THE SHORT STORY MAGAZINE

ARGOSY

OCTOBER, 1960

Price in SOUTH AFRICA
AUSTRALIA and NEW ZEALAND
TWO SHILLINGS
AND SIXPENCE

AGATHA CHRISTIE

Hercule Poirot mystery

H. E. BATES

DAVID WALKER

BRIAN CLEEVE

BERKELY MATHER

JANE GASKELL

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ARGOSY

A Fleetway magazine

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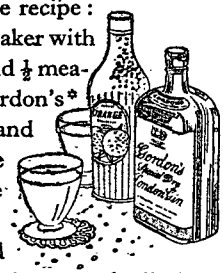

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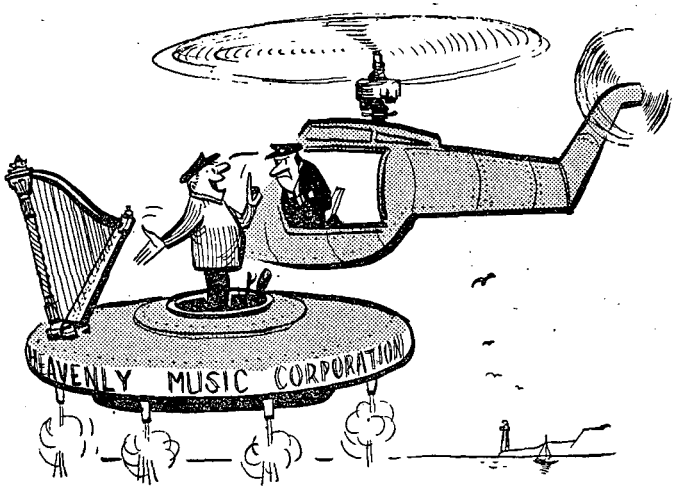

Log Book

IT was certain to come. With all the other adjuncts of present-day life becoming increasingly canned, processed, and scientifically planned, the efficiency boys were bound to get round to human relations sooner or later, and now it's happened.

We have been reading a report by a Swedish expert, aimed at secretaries and high-pressure salesmen, giving advice on the management of boss, client, or customer—and presumably his tactics could also be applied to your wife, children, or the old lady next door who will drop snails over the garden fence.

Once you have thoroughly absorbed his principles you will be able to sell a harp to a man in a helicopter, or a parasol to a polar bear, or persuade your boss that your grandmother's funeral is being held at Epsom, on Derby day.

The first precept is that you must have faith in yourself and know you are right, which is O.K. by us—offhand we can't think of a single person who doesn't know they are right.

You must remember the customer's subconscious and take care of your syntax—i.e., don't say, " What will you do on Sunday when you run out of soft drinks? " but, " What would you have done last Sunday if you had etc. . . ."—thus you avoid disturbing him too greatly by alarming possibilities and soften him up to buy a case of Sparkling Froot, refreshing and non-alcoholic.

You must take care never to use any statement that might elicit

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. . . sell a parasol to a polar bear

the rejoinder "So what?" and you must beware of arousing guilt feelings. But—and this applies to both secretaries and salesmen—if you should have the misfortune to put your boss or customer in a passion, give him exactly six minutes to cool down. No one, according to the expert, can stay in a rage for longer than that; sheer physical exhaustion supervenes. (We should very much like to know by what experimental processes they arrived at this figure and can't help feeling that we have known customers and even bosses who could go on dangerously smouldering for a longer period than that, but one must accept the word of science or where should we all be?)

A point that worries us is, what does one do during the vital six minutes? Run round the block? Sharpen eighteen pencils? Begin cutting the customer's lawn with the mower he so passionately doesn't want to buy? Offer him a bottle of Sparkling Froot and swig one yourself? And do you carry a pocket pinger to advise you when time's up, or do you keep surreptitiously looking at your watch? Applying such cut-and-dried tactics to human problems has plenty of drawbacks, we reckon, and it's going to make mayhem of fiction by and by.

We weren't surprised to see a headline in somebody else's paper in the train the other day which suggested that one profession was trying to eliminate the tricky personal angle altogether:

MECHANICAL PATIENT AS AID TO ANÆSTHETISTS

New Devices to Eliminate the Human Element

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That's *real* efficiency for you and we suspect that mechanical bosses, wives, or customers would (note our syntax) remove the need for elaborate management techniques entirely. While waiting for someone to put this scheme into practice we've had a really splendid idea for passing those difficult six minutes.

While your customer (or boss) is biting the doormat and throwing office furniture about—have a couple of Argosies handy, one for each of you, and read a sparkling, refreshing, non-alcoholic story.

No " So What? " about that.

Curtain up on this month's Argosy and a five-star programme: ★ Famous crime-writer **Agatha Christie,** her name a household word in five continents, brings to Argosy her master of detection, Hercule Poirot. Watch him at work in the streets of Chelsea on a baffling matter of murder. If it's your secret ambition to plan a first-rate whodunit, here is a spot of encouragement for writers who give a helping hand at the kitchen sink. Agatha Christie once commented that the really safe and satisfactory place to work out a story in your mind is when you are washing up. The mechanical labour helps the flow of ideas . . .

★ **H. E. Bates'** new Uncle Silas story, *Shandy Lil*, shows that popular and lovable old reprobate in fine romantic mood among the lush honeysuckle and meadowsweet of an English country lane.

★ **David Walker's** brilliant Arctic adventure, *Storms of our Journey*, is another Argosy scoop: an extract (complete in itself) from his important forthcoming novel, *Where the High Winds Blow*. This book, he tells us, has been building since he went to Canada in 1948 and stems from journeys north to the Mackenzie River, and by dogsled to the Arctic Sea. David Walker, best-selling author of *Harry Black* and *Geordie*, hopes to visit Scotland this autumn with his four sons, now 14, 12, 10, and 8.

★ **Brian Cleeve's** delightful new romance of the Red Sea—rollicking, gay, boisterous—has its tender moments. As always in Cleeve's writing the Celt will out, Irish or Welsh! This time his hero is a Welsh sailor.

★ Starring also **Berkely Mather—Jane Gaskell—Nicholas Dee.** And a strong Argosy " first," a sea story by **William Nicholson.** Born and bred in Orkney, his early memories are of sitting in the stern sheets of a dinghy being taught the ABC of sailing by his father.

JOHN SILVER

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WELSH KNIGHT in the RED SEA

by BRIAN CLEEVE

NEVER dared speak to her, I didn't. Hardly dared to look, so beautiful she was. Like a princess in disguise, out of one of Grandma's stories. Dark hair so warm and soft-looking a man could drown in it and die happy. A brown hand like a little bird that would brush against me as she set a drink in front of me, and leave me so weak I couldn't lift up the glass. Proper foolish I must have looked. I see that now, having learnt sense; but all dreams I was then.

Caterina her name was. Tall as my shoulder, about. And a little swing to her hip as she walked to and fro between the café and the kitchen. Even the smudge of dirt on her small face was beautiful, like Cinderella. Ragged like Cinderella, too. An old red skirt, and no shoes, and a striped kind of blouse maybe cut from a man's shirt when he was better than finished with it. Just tears and patches held together with a safety pin.

Every day for near a month I'd been coming, and still not dared speak to her, except to ask for a plate of hash or a drink. All the time we'd been in the little, dirty, Red Sea harbour, waiting for a new propeller from England, and fitting it. Nowhere else I'd go. Just sit there and dream about her, and sometimes I could swear she was noticing me just the way I was noticing her, blushing red as a poppy when she'd catch my eye. And the next minute she'd seem to be looking through me as if I was a window. No sense in coming back, I'd think then. Until five minutes later I'd see her looking at me from the kitchen doorway.

Trouble was, not much experience of girls, I hadn't, to tell what kind of look she was giving me. Got to look somewhere, hasn't she? I'd think. But no harm dreaming, is there? I'd think again. So every night I'd come back.

An Italian café it was, left over from the old times when the Italians were about these parts. And become very poor now, seemingly. Mostly Arabs coming, or sailors like me, looking for

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palm toddy and a plate of hash. Horrible, the hash was, too, made of old camel. When I'd be chewing on the bits of hump I'd think of the little brown hand that laid the plate in front of me. Dream of that hand I would, how I'd hold it and stroke it in the night time. Oh, nothing bad mark you, nothing wrong. Great respect I had for her even in dreaming.

The café was filling up now, which it always did about this time. And there was a big ugly fellow that I'd been noticing often. A face like a railway accident, with a long fleshy nose going two ways at once as if someone had taken a hammer to it, and a harelip. But important, seemingly. When he just lifted his finger the café owner would come running. Caterina's uncle that was, Giuseppe. Small and fat and bald. I was glad to know he wasn't her father. Difficult to dream about a girl if her father looked like that. At least for me. Everything beautiful, a dream should have.

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"You have another drink?" the voice was saying. Like a little soft song being whispered. Listen to it for hours I would have liked. It wasn't very often she said even that much to me. Very sharp eye her uncle kept on her.

"Yes," I breathed, feeling dizzy as she bent down near my shoulder to take the glass. So dizzy I didn't realise she was saying more, breathing it right against my ear almost. "What . . . ?" I said dreamily.

"You British sailor?" she breathed again, her lips hardly moving. "You help me?"

I almost stood up with the shock. "Yes!" Didn't realise I'd shouted till everyone stopped what they were doing and stared. Giuseppe with a tray of hash in his hands halfway out of the dirty doorway of the kitchen. The fellow with the harelip and his mates. Even the old woman in the back that did the cooking.

I felt myself blushing as if I was filling up with fire from my boots to my head. Caterina nearly dropped the glass I'd given her and blushed too. Then hurried off.

Across the smoky room full of smells and shadows I saw the others looking at me very curiously. Made me feel uncomfortable, as if they could see right inside me. Especially the harelipped chap. Ugly as an old devil. Very big. Big as my mate Paddy nearly, and looking bigger being dressed like a tent. You'd never know what they'd have under those old nightshirts. Wicked knives with curly blades likely, that'd make windows in a man's ribs in a second.

"Here is one drink, sailor," Caterina was saying. Come back so soft I hadn't heard her. And then, softer still, "Be in the lane at the back later, midnight—"

I sat nailed to the chair. Dreaming, I must be. Like a story come true. Opened my mouth to try and answer but nothing happened. And round she went clearing dirty cups and glasses off the tables as if she'd said nothing at all.

I saw the big fellow follow her with his eyes, and then look at me. He leaned sideways and whispered to one of the men with him, still looking at me, and the chap he'd spoken to got up and came over, his slippers flopping and his dirty striped nightdress swishing round his legs.

"You come off ship?" he said. He was small and thin, and his fez had mangy spots, but I didn't like the look in his eye at all.

"Yes," I said, bunching myself on the chair. Behind him I saw about six chaps looking very interested in their cups of coffee, and the big fellow with the harelip was staring at the roof. But I had the idea that everyone of them was looking at me out of the corners of his eyes. Proper nasty, it made me feel.

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" Then why don't you go back to ship? " he said. A smile full of teeth stained all red. Something they chew was all it was, but like blood it looked. Gave me quite a turn.

" You for a hammering? " I said, although not feeling nearly so brave. He grinned, and put his hand inside his nightshirt, and behind him the others sat forward on their stools. All except Harelip. He just smiled at the ceiling, looking very bored.

And then I saw out of the corner of my eye that Caterina was in the doorway of the kitchen, hands to her heart and her eyes desperate, trying to catch mine, as much as to say, " Don't fight with them, please, please."

More than glad I was to obey her, I can tell you. " Lucky for you," I said to Mangy Fez, " I was just going anyway." I drained my drink and stood up, wishing I was tall. Built broad I am, but a man needs to be tall to make a grand exit from a situation like that. Tower over people. And my legs are bandy, which makes it worse.

" You are wise man," said Mangy Fez.

I went across the café with my ears burning, trying to understand what it was all about. When I got near to Harelip he stuck out his leg in its pointed slipper, so that I'd have to step over it. I stopped, looking at him, and he gave me back a look like a butcher measuring a side of meat for the hook.

" Don't come again, sailor," he said. " We don't like you here." He nodded to where Caterina must still have been standing in the kitchen doorway, behind me. " You look at my girl too much."

" Who said she was your girl ?" I growled.

" I said," Harelip smirked, and nodded his head as if he was dismissing me, proper contemptuous.

I lifted my fist, and there was a rustle behind me and the prick of steel in my ribs. I dropped my fist real quick, I tell you, and the knife point went away and someone snickered. I stepped forward, just as if I was going quietly, but all of a sudden, with my foot in mid air, I gave a little skip, see, and the heel of my boot came down with a crunch on Harelip's foot. Fourteen stone of me above it, too. He yelled. But by that time I was running.

Proper rats' patter of feet after me, and sounding murderish, but I used to do the hundred yards in ten seconds at the Swansea sports with the wind behind me, and the thought of that knife that had pricked me was better than any wind.

It was only when I was halfway up the gangplank to the ship, a mile away, that I remembered I was supposed to be going back to the café at midnight. And I came up short as if I'd run into the side of the ship.

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"What's the matter?" Paddy said. He was watchman that night, and standing by the gangway.

Couldn't answer him for a full minute, I couldn't, and by the time I could I'd decided not to. Proper laugh Paddy would have had if I told him about Caterina. No heart he hasn't, being Irish, and then he'd tell Shorty, who is worse, being English, poor soul, and brought up deathly stupid in Somerset. Just laugh they would, and I wouldn't hear the last of it so long as we were sailing together.

"Nothing," I said. "Just practising running like. Do you good after a skinful, it does." Then I went below to think. Does me better to think when I lie down. But what could thinking do now? Just have to go back, I would, and chance it.

And so near to twelve midnight there I was creeping through the laneways up to the café. More than ghostly, I can tell you. Every corner expecting one of the shadows to move out and give me a passport to join my grandpa. All I could do to keep moving sometimes. But then I'd think of Caterina and my heart would give a little skip for my heels to copy.

Dark as an old cellar it was. No street lighting in those parts, gas or electric. No municipal sense they haven't. For a minute I didn't know which of the mud walls was the café and which wasn't, until the smell of that old camel hash told me. Hanging like a fog even in the lane.

"Psssssт," I whispered.

"Pssst," came a little soft breath of a whisper back, and I near dropped on the ground with the fright even though I was expecting it. Right from above my head, up in the sky. Ghosts, I thought of. Then I looked up and saw her. Just a little round head peeping over the edge of the flat roof. See her against the sky, I could, and her eyes shining.

"Can you climb up, sailor?" she whispered. I put my hand to the corner of the wall, and felt it all crumbly where the donkeys and the camels rubbed against it turning into the lane.

"Easy," I whispered up; and true enough in three lifts of my hand and kicks of my boot I was up on a level with her, and my belly on the parapet of the flat roof. Not slates and slopes like with us, see, but flat so's you can sleep on it.

"Oh, I was so hopeful you would come," she whispered, her little soft, warm hands pulling me over on to the roof.

Kneeling down she was, and I was kneeling, and I'd have given a month's pay to have had Paddy's ways with a girl just for that minute. Taken her in his arms he would have and no nonsense. But I was brought up respectable always, with a three-foot cane,

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and the lessons you learn that way stick in your mind somehow. Didn't dare let my breath from my mouth kneeling there, for fear it would meet her breath. Wouldn't have been seemly.

"You said you wanted help?" I whispered.

"You swear you never tell what I tell you now?"

Leaning forward she was looking earnest right into my eyes, and putting up her finger to my lips. Took me all my time not to fall down. Feel the warmth of her I could. Face like a little flower, and that old shirt fastened with a safety pin not disguising her as clothes ought, either. Taken the cane to me my mam would if I ever described to her what I was seeing then. Had to close my eyes.

"Catch cold you will," I said, my voice croaking.

"You swear?" she whispered. Proper pressing against my lips her finger was. All I could do not to kiss it. Taste like a lollipop it would too, surely.

"I swear," I whispered. And when I dared open my eyes again she was sitting back, looking so sad I could have cried for her. "Tell me what it is," I breathed.

"You know that ugly man tonight?" she whispered. "Hanif?"

I nodded. "Left him lame I did. Did you see?"

"My uncle says I must marry him."

"Him? Harelip?" I whispered, horrified. That ugly-looking accident? Kill him first I would, and bury him in a pit.

She let her head droop forward in a slow nod, her black hair slipping across her shoulders. "Yes," she whispered. "Hanif is rich man, and full of wickedness. He frighten my uncle so much my uncle don't know what to say. Then he offer him money for me. My uncle don't care then. Just take the money and say, 'Up, you lazy girl. Marry this fine man or I take a palm rod to your backside and make you screech. Next month, the latest.' That was two weeks gone past. Ohimé, I feel so sad."

"What do you want me to do?" I breathed. Hammer him I would, flat as cardboard.

"I want you to take me away . . ." she murmured, and I tell you, the roof could have hit me and left my wits better. One side of my heart leaping like a young ram on the spring hillside thinking of it. And the other half proper sodden like a wet Sunday in Swansea High Street.

How would I get her on the ship, first off? And what would they say at home ever, their David bringing back such a little white dove from the Red Sea? Empty the saucepan on us both, my mam would, and she at me after each trip to marry Pryce Grocer's daughter, Gwen.

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Five years older than me Gwen is, and squints ferocious, but she can afford to squint, Mam says, being Pryce Grocer's only child and inheriting the shop. And with the light out, squinting won't bother, she says.

Dread going home sometimes I do, on account of Gwen. But one thing to dread going home. Quite another bringing my mam home a daughter-in-law speaking English with a funny accent and no Welsh at all. Couldn't so much as swallow, I tell you.

Just then the moon came out, swimming up yellow as a big pan of cream into the sky. Far away it made Swansea seem, and farther still when I got a proper look at Caterina. Legs drawn under her old skirt, and prettiest feet you can imagine peeping out like little white kittens hiding under a chair. And her cheeks blushing dark as red roses, and her neck soft and curving like a white stem for them. Oh, words of gold and silver you would need to describe her looks. Swooning I felt to think what she was offering, and me so loutish I could only think of difficulties.

"I want you to take me down to the harbour tomorrow night," she was whispering.

Funny look in her eyes as she was whispering it too, but that would be modesty, I thought. Devil throw the old difficulties into a pit! Hide her in my locker, I would, and feed her on condensed milk.

"Indeed I will," I breathed. "Walk across the Red Sea barefoot we will if necessary, like old Moses."

"Listen," she whispered. "There will be a sea captain there—captain of a little dhow, who is my friend since I was small. If only you can bring me safe to him tomorrow midnight, he will carry me up the coast to where I will be safe. He cannot come here to the fonduk because he is known. And I cannot go to him alone . . ."

"Up the coast?" I stammered. "Where you'll be safe?"

"Yes," she whispered, twisting her hands together in her lap and looking down at them. "I have cousins there—and one of them—loves me." Looking up at me then as if I had said he didn't.

Talk of hearts dying. Fell in ruins mine did, like old ashes in a grate stirred with a big poker. Couldn't speak. Half got up to jump over the parapet and leave her I did, and let her old cousin look after her. Hard to tell what stopped me. Her little hands, I think it was, twisting so nervous in her lap.

Hadn't promised me anything, had she? Just asking for help. Wicked you are, Taffy Edwards, I thought. Maiden in distress like in a story and you behaving as if you'd been given short change in a public house. Dreadful to think. Good hammering

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is what you need. So I sat down again hoping she hadn't noticed.

"Will you help me?" she whispered. "The good nuns who teach me English say—British sailor always have heart of oak."

"I'll be here," I whispered miserably. "Anything else?"

All of a sudden she put her finger to my lips. "Ssh."

I heard it too, then. Soft slither of footsteps tiptoeing away down the lane, as if they'd been listening underneath. Careless we must have been, letting whispering get loud.

"Quick," she hissed. "See if all is clear and then jump and run—maybe that person tell my uncle he hear whispers here."

Put my head over the parapet half expecting a bullet. Dark like an old drain it looked, the moon not reaching down into the lane yet. Well, no good lingering. Over with my legs trying not to think of knives waiting.

"Tomorrow midnight," Caterina breathed in my ear. So close I could feel her warm breath on me. Almost swear I could have that her lips touched me. Then I dropped the full stretch of my arms, and down. Landed soft in the dust on all fours and started running.

Round the corner I stopped to get my breath. No sense making a great noise running if people were listening for it. Not a sound. Then back at the café someone shouting. The old uncle that would be. The sound of a smack loud as a pistol shot and Caterina's voice screeching, "No, no, no!" Must be saying there was no one there with her. Then another smack.

Come back, I would have, to flatten him with his smacking, only that would have ruined things. So I had to walk off. Didn't sleep much that night, I can tell you.

And next day and evening was worse. Watchman from six to midnight I was, and in mortal terror Paddy wouldn't come back to relieve me. Then to crown all the old man sent down word that work was finished on the propeller and no one was to be ashore after midnight. Two in the morning we'd be sailing, and he'd have the liver out of any man that was missing.

Paddy and Shorty came on board at half past eleven hardly able to stand up, let alone listen to sense about covering up for me that I was going when I shouldn't. Just have to trust to luck, I would.

So I propped Paddy up against the stanchion by the gangway, looking like a watchman, and off into the town with me. Just about enough time there would be, if everything went smooth.

But ten minutes later I realised things weren't going to go smooth at all. A hundred yards from the café I was brought up all standing, seeing two men half hidden in the shadows of the

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lane. Watchful-looking. And then to make definite, I saw one of their faces as he lit a match to see the watch on his wrist. Mangy Fez it was, no doubt at all. Waiting in ambush.

Round to the other end of the lane by backstreets then, but hardly any need to look. Two men there, too. And a donkey as well. Tied up to a grating in the wall. Donkey? What would they want a donkey for? A dog, yes. But a donkey?

Then it came to me. Proper shuddersome, too. Carry a corpse nicely, a donkey could. Only thing that stopped me running right back to the ship that minute was my legs. Wouldn't work at all, except for shaking. What did I care if Caterina married old Harelip or her cousin?

Trouble was, I did care. "Heart of oak," she'd said. Trusted me. Up on the roof waiting she would be this very minute, saying to herself, "Taff is my true knight." Couldn't let her down and her thinking like that, could I?

But what to do? Both ends of the lane guarded. A mouse couldn't creep past. Well then, looking for someone going quietly, they would be. Take them by surprise properly if I wasn't quiet. Sing to them I would. *Men of Harlech.* So I started to sing, rolling down the lane as if I'd had a skinful. Even the donkey looked surprised.

The two men came out of the shadows, staring at me, but no knives in their hands, see, because they were sure I couldn't be me, making all that noise. They thought I was someone else. Right up close to them, singing *Men of Harlech* like at a football match, and bouncing off one wall of the lane and then the other with my shoulders.

Wrestler's trick that is. Get a nice drive off a wall you can. And I did then. There they were, standing staring, and the donkey behind them. Bounce off the left wall. Bounce off the right wall, and down with my head and dive in a lovely Rugby tackle. Say it myself, I have to, that it was lovely, because no one else there who understood Rugby. Just thought they'd been hit by a railway engine those poor ambushers must have. My shoulder against their skinny legs, and then their heads hitting off the opposite wall like coconuts. Fezzes rolling each way, and nightshirts flying up like balloon spinnakers.

Gave me another idea that did. Stripped off their nightshirts and rolled them in a bundle with the fezzes.

Then I thought of the donkey. Best disguise of all, that would be. Looking for a sailor and a girl, old Harelip was. Fool him proper, we might, in fezzes and nightshirts, and Caterina riding on the donkey. And we'd need to fool him too, I was beginning to think. Best part of three miles to the Arab harbour, and the

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dear knew how many of his little friends there looking for us.

"Come, little donkey, my darling," I whispered. "Work to do." But only leaned her ear at me, she did. Not intending to budge. And just about to fetch her a wallop with my boot when I remembered my grandpa telling me something.

"Donkeys like poetry," he said. "Not just any old poetry now, but poetry about donkeys."

Well, that was Welsh donkeys, see, but maybe it would work with a Red Sea donkey as well. Anyway, no harm trying.

"Proper beautiful little ass you are," I said, untying her rope. "Mary had a little ass, its fleas were black as pitch," I recited. And as sure as donkeys have long ears I tell you she looked pleased. Nuzzled me.

Clicked her hoofs then, and came with me as easy as a bicycle. Wonderful the power of poetry. And two minutes later we were under the back of the café. "Pssst," I whispered. Just on midnight it was too, but no answer.

"Psssssт." Still no answer. And at that I got a terrible cold feeling round my small ribs. Maybe they'd done something to her?

"You stay here," I told the donkey. And up with me on to the roof in a pair of seconds. No one there. Empty. I crept forward, looking for the ladder down into the house. There it was. But what would be down there? Old Harelip, likely, and some of his bullyboys.

Anyway, there was one sure way to find out. I put my legs through the hole in the roof, and slid down the ladder. Not a stir. In some kind of passage, I was. A crack of light up the passage in front of me. Four steps along to it, and my ears against the wood. Voices whispering. Couldn't make out a word because they were speaking foreign languages, but no doubt at all it was the old uncle and Harelip, confabbing together about their wickedness in the front of the café, and expecting to hear any minute that I was ready to be planted.

Well, if they were there, likely enough Caterina was locked up in her room. Wouldn't have her with them to witness their murderousness, surely. So softly as a little mouse back down the passage, feeling for doors. One here, but open, so that wasn't it. Another one open. And then one with a big wooden bolt drawn across it. And my heart beating so loud it sounded like knocking.

Quiet as feathers falling I drew that old bolt. One squeak out of it and I wouldn't see Swansea again. Even old Gwen didn't seem so bad that minute. Door open. Me in. Door shut.

"Kathy," I whispered. And heard a little stir and sobbing in

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the darkness. Two steps across to her, praying she wouldn't scream.

"It's me—Taff," I said. "Train is going in a minute."

And with that two arms went round my waist, and I thought I was a dead man. But it was only her catching hold of me. Pressing her little head against my stomach, and hot tears soaking my shirt.

"No time for crying," I breathed, lifting her upright.

"Oh, my hero," she whispered. And two warm lips against my lips.

"None of that," I said, swallowing. "Remember your cousin that loves you dearly. Hard enough to get you to him it will be, without us kissing and cuddling."

"Yes," she breathed, "I had forgotten . . ." And she gave a funny little sigh in the dark. I think I sighed too, but no help for it.

"Are you ready to come?" I whispered. "Then hold on to my belt." Out of the door again. Down the dark passage, find the ladder.

Didn't dare whisper now, just take her under the arms and lift her up the first rungs. Soft and warm as a kitten. More than heart of oak I needed that minute, I can promise. Heart of old stone. But no time for foolishness now, as I'd just said. Work to do. So I followed her up the ladder with my eyes shut and brought her over to the parapet.

"I'll go first; then you jump into my arms," I breathed. Over and down. Dropping on all fours beside the donkey. Quite like a friend that old ass was by now. Glad to see her.

"Jump now," I whispered, holding out my arms, and Caterina on the parapet, crouching, jumping. Not very heavy, she wasn't, but heavy enough to knock me flat. Near winded me, knees right in my belly.

"You all right?" she whispered, helping me up.

Proper unromantic it was, and me hardly able to speak. Nearly a minute before I could tell her to put on one of the nightshirts and a fez to disguise herself.

"You sit on the donkey," I said. "Just like the donkey rides at Aberystwyth, it will be."

And off we went, her riding and me leading, whispering donkey rhymes into the long furry ear of the ass. Round an elbow in the lane and down to the end. Where the two ambushers had been. And had been was right. Ought to have been lying there still, the thump I'd given them, but they weren't. Heads like rocks they must have had, because they were gone.

Oh, this is bad, I thought, but not saying it. No sense in

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alarming Caterina. Just hurry up the donkey, while trying to think.

Where had they gone to ? Old Harelip, of course, in the café. So they must have only just gone, or I'd have heard voices shouting when we were still in the passage. What would they do ? Look in at Caterina first, then go running down all the lanes, but especially towards the harbour. See them searching any minute, we would. The disguises didn't seem so wonderful then, I can tell you.

" Turn right," Caterina was whispering now and then. " Turn left." And all the time my ears listening for feet running. Into a dark lane so narrow I had to walk in front of the donkey. And suddenly at the far end of it a torch flashing, and the beam reaching towards us. Try to turn round and they'd know it was us. Go forward and they'd see it was us as soon as we were close.

Like one of those old puzzles with no answer, wasn't it ? No turnings left or right. And the walls both sides of us too high to go up. Just stood there, I did, for what seemed like a year of wet Sundays, wondering what my mam would say when she heard I was buried out foreign.

" Serve him right for not marrying Gwen Pryce Grocer," was what she'd say probably. Torch coming nearer.

" Oh, Tarfa." Caterina whispering behind me. " We are dead . . ."

" Not yet," I said. Rugby teaches you a thing or two. Eight forwards built like houses all pounding down on top of you, and nothing but you between them and the goal line. You stand up to that and you'll stand up to any old Harelip and his bullies. Torchbeam in my face now, recognising me, and about five of them, shouting, " Wah, Wah, Wah," just like old Kipling's Fuzzy-Wuzzies.

" Up the Welsh," I yelled, and ran for them, head down, dragging the donkey behind me. Took the first of them like a battering ram, and the rest went down like ninepins. Didn't tread too carefully going over the top of them, either, and neither did the donkey, judging from the screeches. Thought we were clear then, for a minute—until I saw him.

One more man ahead of us. Filling the lane, he seemed to be, and before we got even close I knew who it was. Old Harelip himself, and a knife in his hand looking big enough to chop down a tree.

Proper trapped we were. Five of them behind us. Harelip in front of us. Didn't seem any hope at all. Feel that knife going through me like a skewer I could, and coming out the other side.

Mam was right, I thought. Marry Gwen you should have and

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stayed out of trouble. Yet funny thing, just thinking of Gwen made me wild as a Welsh dragon. Old knives, was it? Face full of fist I'd give him if I could get close enough.

That was the trouble, getting close enough. No room to dodge, see, in that little lane. And all the time I was thinking this my feet still running, and the donkey clattering after me, and Caterina screeching, and Harelip waiting for us. Arms spread wide. Knife point sticking upwards.

Only one chance that I could see. No good swerving. So just ran straight at him I did, and his big grinning face waiting, and the knife swinging up fast as a snake to catch me in the belly before I could get to him.

But one yard short of him I let fly with my boot, see, and caught him just under the wrist. Miss that kick and I was for trouble, I can tell you. Wake sweating I do sometimes, dreaming I was missing it. But it didn't miss. His wrist snapped like an old stick, and the knife flew up bright as a new moon. Wretched he looked. Mouth opened like a black hole, ready to shout. But didn't have time.

Lovely left cross I gave him and a right uppercut to follow through. Lifted into the air he did, and fell on his back, beautiful. Long time it would be before he'd try marrying another maiden against her wishes, unless he had no sense. But no place for moralising, that lane. Just get out of it quick, while they were still picking themselves up behind us. Keep going.

Turn left, turn right. Confused a mole, they would have, all those lanes. Shouting behind us for a while, and then nothing, as they lost us down wrong turnings. But that didn't stop us running. Proper medicine for running, a fright like that is.

Twenty minutes later we were down at the harbour, looking for the little dhow. And glad to jump on board I can tell you.

"He can drop me off at the steamship harbour," I said. "I don't fancy walking back. He can have the donkey for the fare."

Just stretched myself out on the deck then, and stared at the stars and the moon coming up. Everything flat suddenly. Never see her again, I wouldn't. Half sorry I was I hadn't been mortally wounded saving her. What good would life be to me now, going back alone to Swansea and old Gwen? Get me for sure she would, one of these days, unless I was safe married to someone else.

Trouble was I'd never be able to look at anyone else after Caterina. Gwen it would have to be for sure, and measuring out old soap and cheese for the rest of my life. Cried, I could have.

"Oh, Tarfa," a voice was whispering. Little hand touching mine. Small foot curled up under the edge of her skirt beside

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me on the deck. Moonlight on dark hair and warm soft mouth. "Do you not want to speak to me, Tarfa?" Face bending very close to mine, over me, eyes shining.

"Remember your cousin that loves you," I whispered, "waiting for you up the coast."

"I remember," she breathed. "But you don't ask me one thing."

"What's that?" I said hollowly. Hollow is only way to speak when you feel like I did then.

"You don't ask me if I love him."

"What?" I said, my throat suddenly so tight I thought the breath wouldn't find its way out. "Do—I mean, don't—?"

"No," she whispered. "I never did. But you such a slow man to steal a girl, I have to let you think—"

"What—?" I started, but you can't ask questions through kisses, can you? And by the time we had to stop kissing for breath, there weren't many questions I wanted to ask. Except one. "Do you like condensed milk?" I said.

Bit puzzled she looked at that, and before she could answer, the dhow was slipping under the stern of our old ship, and there was Shorty leaning over the rail watching.

"Throw down a ladder," I whispered up. "We've got a passenger."

Lot of trouble there was after. Condensed milk made her sick as a cat, and the old man found her when we were two days out. But nothing much he could do then till we got to Cape Town, and we got married there and paid her passage out of my back wages. Passage home, too.

You should have seen my mam's face when I brought her in. But nothing to Gwen Pryce Grocer's. Married Jones the Post's son Evan after, and beats him cruel when she's in a temper. Wake up shuddering I do sometimes, dreaming it's me not him.

Then I hear Caterina singing downstairs as she opens the shutters of the café we've started, and I roll over for another five minutes dreaming about her instead. Blissful, that is. Proper blissful.

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★ ★ ★

BROWN STUDY

I can't quite summon up the nerve
To bare my pale, imperfect torso,
'Til all around me I observe
Shapes like mine—or even more so!

SELMA RASKIN, *First Day at the Beach*

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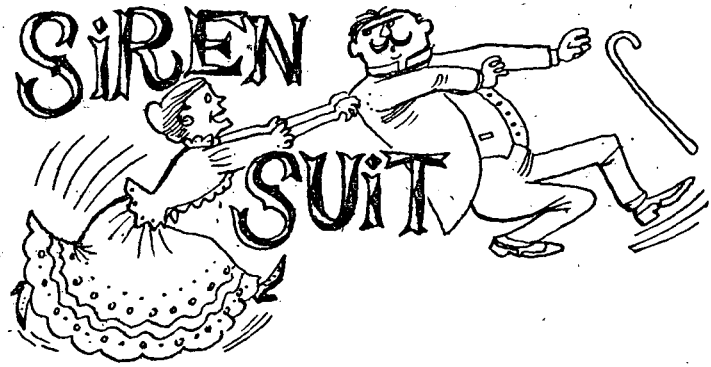

'Tis leap-year, lady . . .

GEORGE CHAPMAN, *Bussy D'Ambois*, 1608

She clasped my big, red hand, and fell
Adown upon her knees,
And cried: " You know I love you well,
So be my husband, please!"

EUGENE FIELD, 1850-1895

Rough Passage

" I have long loved a young gentleman who, however, takes no notice of me. I have often thought of writing to him by an unknown hand but modesty forbade that, and to tell him is impossible. I have tried every way to conquer my unhappy passion but cannot; the more I try to hate him the more I love. Do give me your advice.

" P.S. Do not say you think he loves another for that would drive me to distraction."

Letter in The Lady's Magazine, 1785

Clear Specification

St. Catherine, St. Catherine, O lend me thine aid,
And grant that I never may die an old maid.

A husband, St. Catherine,
A good one, St. Catherine,
But arn-a-one better than
Narn-a-one, St. Catherine.

Hampshire Folksong

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Starting Well

The spinster, who eked out a poor existence by boiling and selling toffee, was also lonely, in fact desperate for a husband, but too modest and proud to seek one . . .

Then one day the spinster stole into the church and threw herself down on her knees. " O Lord! " she prayed, " please be mindful of me, and send me a man to marry! "

Now the blacksmith by chance was up in the belfry, mending the old church clock. Every breathless word of the spinster's entreaties rose clearly to where he was. When he heard her praying, " Please send me a man! " he nearly fell off the roof with excitement. But he kept his head, tuned his voice to Jehovah's, and boomed " Will a blacksmith do? "

" Ern a man's better than nern, dear Lord! " cried the spinster gratefully.

At which the blacksmith ran home, changed into his best, and caught the spinster on her way out of church. He proposed and they married, and lived forever contented, and used his forge for boiling their toffee.

LAURIE LEE, *Cider With Rosie*

Gentle thou art, and therefore to be won;
Beauteous thou art, therefore to be assailed;
And when a woman woos, what woman's son
Will sourly leave her till she have prevailed?

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *Sonnet xli*

Engaged Signal

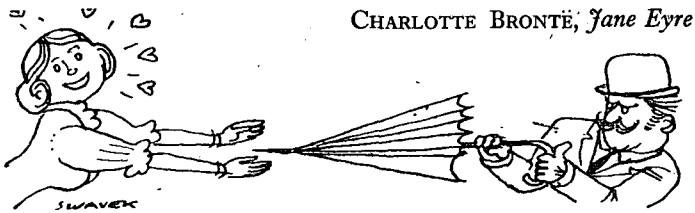
" Cocher, êtes-vous fiancé? "
" Non, mademoiselle."
" Alors, prenez-moi."

Anonymous dialogue in Paris fiacre

The End

Reader, I married him.

CHARLOTTE BRONTË, *Jane Eyre*



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RETURNED WITHOUT THANKS

BY BERKELY MATHER

CHRYLLA was crying again when they arrived at the airport. Clive fought down the surge of rage that almost choked him. He parked by the Departures Hall and turned to her with painful patience.

" Listen," he said, " your mother has invited you to Rome for a month. You said you wanted to go—then you didn't—and finally we have another session of gentle tears. Make up your mind, can't you? "

" I—I do—and I don't—" she faltered.

He sat back in the driving seat and gazed at the car roof with the air of a longsuffering yogi on a bed of nails, then something snapped. " You're going," he ground out, and turned and opened the back door of the car for the luggage porter. " Two suitcases and a dressing-case," he told the man. " Flight A24—Rome."

" My—my jewel-case? " she queried.

" Inside the big suitcase. I put it there myself. If you carry it with you, you'll lose the damn thing again like you did in Milan." He handed her her passport. " Go and get this stamped while I get the luggage through."

He turned and looked back when he came to the swing doors of the Departures Hall. She was still standing by the car, alternately dabbing at her eyes with a balled-up handkerchief and fumbling in her handbag as the porter pulled the cases from the rear seat. The reflection of his own face in the glass of the door pulled him up short. It was a white mask of frozen rage.

He pulled himself together and lit a cigarette, but the smoke tasted hot and acrid and it burnt his already dry throat. It was a drink he needed. He ground out the cigarette under his heel and joined the queue at the ticket window and then went and searched

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★ *For Argosy readers the name of favourite author Berkely Mather spells fast-paced adventure—vivid, exciting, enthralling. Remember his brilliant Balkan novel, "The Achilles Affair"?*

This month he brings Argosy a fascinating tour de force. In less than the schoolboy's proverbial 100 lines—about 90, we reckon—he gives us this tense high-lit incident.

10 guineas to any Argosy reader who can pack a punch of this calibre into a 100-line adventure; typed entries only, please, to the Editor, Argosy, Fleetway House, London E.C.4. (marked Short-Short)

through the crowd at the baggage scales for their porter. He got the cases weighed and labelled and saw them on their way up the baggage chute and then, as the Tannoys were crackling their last summons for the flight, he joined her at Channel 9.

He handed her the ticket. "All stamped," he said. "That's your baggage chit—you claim your stuff at Customs the other end. Don't lose it."

He expected another outburst of restrained sobbing and was relieved when it didn't come. She hesitated for a moment and seemed about to say something—then she shrugged slightly, sighed, and turned and followed the other passengers towards the channel to the tarmac bus. He was halfway across to the bar when he heard her call.

He wheeled, fighting for his self-control. "You'll miss the damn thing," he said through clenched teeth. "What the devil have you thought of now?"

Without a word she pushed an envelope into his hand, turned again, and raced up the channel. He stuffed it into his pocket and breasted the bar. He didn't even taste his first double whisky, but the third pulled him together.

He went back to the car and sat and waited until the plane roared overhead, and then he started up and drove slowly out of the exit. One fifteen. Exactly an hour to go—that is, if it worked properly. He shrugged impatiently. Of course it would work. A Swiss precision travelling-clock, a fulminate percussion cap, and seven pounds of plastic explosive in the jewel-case? It would scatter that plane across twenty miles of the Haute-Savoie, and the experts would still be theorising over the accident in ten years' time.

He wondered how and when the news would come through. He hoped it would reach him when there were people around so they could hear and remember his terrible cry and then see him blanch—how did one blanch?—and hurry to the telephone to ring the airline to beg for news of possible survivors. He'd do it well, as he did everything, particularly when the pay-off amounted to fifteen thousand pounds of life insurance—and Ella.

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He glanced at his watch. Seven minutes to go, and he was already nearing Winchester. He must have been driving fast—too fast. He didn't want to reach Longlands too early and, when he did, he wanted to be calm and composed. He eased his foot off the accelerator and coasted to a stop under a wayside tree. Three minutes to go now.

He fumbled for a cigarette and his hand came into contact with the letter she had given him. He looked at the one scrawled word—*Clive*—on the envelope, and wondered what was in it. The usual thing, no doubt. " Can't we try and make a fresh start? Can't we pull together and try to get our marriage off the rocks? "—and the rest of her clichés. Too late now, my dear.

One minute to go. Should he burn it without reading it? No—he'd have a look at her last impassioned cri de cœur. He slit the envelope. There were only a few words.

I have tried—you know I have tried. I tried right up to this minute, but I can't take any more. I'm not coming back. I'm leaving you. I wish Ella joy of her bargain. Chrylla.

And then his eye dropped to the postscript.

I'm taking nothing of yours with me. I've put the jewel-case in the boot of the car.

He was in the frantic act of leaping out when it went off.

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THE BOARS

Her masts screamed in protest
and bent like willows

BY WILLIAM NICHOLSON

"THERE'S a bit o' a lift in the Firth the day," Jock Norquoy said, shelling another limpet into the bait-box.

"Aye; an' I don't like them wisps o' cloud to the east'ard," Jimmie Norquoy said, tying a fresh hook on his line.

"Sandy o' the Breck was sayin' there'd be plenty o' cod off the Skerries," Weelum Norquoy said, pulling down the home-spun jersey over his ample waist.

The three brothers bent their heads once more to their tasks and a watery sun bobbed out of the East Sea, staining the sky a pale sherry colour.

It had been a good season's fishing and the weather was still mild. Jock Norquoy reflected, with a warm feeling in his innards, that he would give the missus and bairns a Lammas treat for a change.

Jimmie Norquoy, who was courting, mentally thumbed out several pound notes for the most expensive coat in town for his Annie.

Weelum Norquoy patted his waistline and belched comfortably. He was a confirmed bachelor: women interfered with the essential things in a man's life, such as solid drinking on a Saturday evening. He had visions of ale flowing sweetly at the Lammas Market.

They gathered up their gear and stowed it in creels, lines coiled neatly and ample bait in the box. They slung the creels over their shoulders, lines held in the crook of their arms, Jock in addition carrying the bait-box, and set out for the dinghy. Jock got into the dinghy first, carefully depositing his creel, line, and bait in the bow; Jimmie next, followed by Weelum who sat down heavily in the stern.

This was the order of precedence hallowed by time. Jock was not the senior in years; in fact, he was the youngest of the three brothers, but it was tacitly agreed that he was the best seaman and his word was final upon matters relating to the boat.

They rowed out towards the yawl, nodding contentedly at

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anchor. She was built of solid teak and wide of beam to withstand the heavy seas of the northern reaches, but there was a grace of line that proclaimed the thoroughbred. A plate, richly engraved in letters of gold, announced her name to be the *Three Brothers*. They clambered aboard and set about the hundred and one tasks of preparing a boat for sea.

"There's Sandy o' the Breck just casting off," Weelum said, watching a gleaming white yawl get under way with foresail and jib.

"There'll be plenty o' time to catch the tide," Jock said, carefully locking the rudder-holds.

Although Weelum would never question his brother's judgment, for experience had taught him that his brother was almost invariably right, he always got a pang of uneasiness when another boat slipped the moorings before they did.

At last the masts were set, the bowsprit was run out and the sails were neatly folded ready to hoist.

Jock again cast an uneasy eye towards the east. The sun was now well up, but there was still a watery haze on the horizon and every now and again a finger of cloud streaked overhead. He didn't like it, but he knew that his brothers were anxious to go, as Sandy o' the Breck had said that there were plenty of fish out by the Skerries.

He set a match to his pipe, held in cupped hands, and got it drawing sweetly. He nodded to Jimmie who held the moorings with a half-turn round the bollard: Jimmie let go at once and Weelum braced up the sprit as the foresail began to fill. They wouldn't hoist the mainsail until they were well out into the bay and could get a good look at the Firth. If the seas were high they would run out to the fishing grounds under foresail and jib, or even foresail alone.

On the third tack the mouth of the bay was well open and they had a clear view of the Firth. Jock, who sat at the helm, noticed a few white horses off the Tarf Tail of Swona, but otherwise the seas were not breaking. Sandy o' the Breck already stood well out under full sail.

Jock waved his pipe-stem along the line of the main mast and Weelum at once hoisted the mainsail. The *Three Brothers* heeled under the increased press of canvas and Jock felt the bite of the rudder as the seas gurgled past.

In minutes they were clear of the headland and the yawl crouched down to the freshened breeze, the lee gunwale dipping into the water. This was her finest reach. The bowsprit twanged as each gust of wind slapped into the jib, and the seas boiled past the stern.

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To Jock the *Three Brothers* was more than just a boat, she was the fourth member of the family. Built by a distant cousin, she was one of those freaks of perfection that a craftsman pulls off now and then. She was by far the best sailing yawl, and at the same time the most seaworthy, in the bay. The Norquoy brothers had more than once had envious glances cast their way by the rest of the islanders.

Jock sat contentedly at the helm, his eyes lifting now and then to note the set of the sails. This, and the run home from the fishing, was the part he liked best. Although he had never so much as hinted this to his brothers, he was really rather bored with the actual fishing itself. The endless humdrum task of hauling in lines, hooking on the bait, and throwing them overboard again he found tedious.

He was really a romantic, although he would have shuddered had anyone suggested the possibility to him. Often in the evenings he would lie on the cliff edge and watch the sun go down into the sea: he would speculate upon what lay across the golden waves to the westward . . .

They were now closing in on the eddy off the Skerries which lay well down to the leeward. As they crossed the last ripples of the ebb, they overhauled Sandy o' the Breck who was bowling along for all he was worth.

Weelum waved a derisive painter over his head and roared out, "Want a tow?"

Sandy looked straight ahead, stony-faced.

As soon as they were in on the eddy they lowered the sails and, while Jimmie "held on" with the oars, Jock and Weelum cast their lines overboard.

The minutes went by without a bite. At last Weelum got a tug and hauled in his line to find a tiddling little haddock suspended from one of the hooks. Sandy o' the Breck was faring no better. Weelum, whose great joy in life apart from drinking ale was hauling in fish, at last turned to Jock.

"How aboot tryin' Billag's Hole?"

Jock looked doubtful. There was almost always good fishing to be had at Billag's Hole, but it meant crossing the Boars on the way home and the sky was none too promising. The Boars was no place for a yawl when the flood tide was making.

He knew Weelum and his weaknesses; but there was something about his expression today . . .

"Might as weel tak' a short trick," Jock said, finally. "There's no' goin' to be anything doin' here this day."

In a trice the sails were up and the *Three Brothers* headed out into the Firth once more. Jock studied his bearings. He was

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on a course that would take him right over Billag's Hole. When Duncansby Lighthouse lined up with the Cairn Hill he would be there . . . now. He pushed the tiller hard down and brought the yawl into the wind. The sails were lowered, and the lines once more cast over the gunwales.

Weelum's line had scarcely run out its measured length when there was an urgent tug and he hauled it in hand over hand with a look of bliss on his face: two beautiful, fat, gleaming cod. He threw them into the basket with a flourish.

Jock was also hauling in as fast as he could, and the basket filled rapidly. He looked to the westward and thought that he could see the flood making far out on the horizon. In ten—fifteen minutes at the outside the flood would be upon them.

"We'd better haul in noo," he said, quickly coiling up his own line.

"Jist one more try, for luck," Weelum said, throwing his lead over the side.

Jock watched anxiously the edge of the tide creeping towards them . . .

At last Weelum got a tug and hauled in two more beauties.

"Must be nigh on five hunnerweight," he said, tossing the fish into the basket. "A grand haul."

They wasted no time in getting the sails set and soon Jock felt the comfortable pull on the helm as the seas gripped the rudder. The slap, slap, slap of the waves on the weather bow was music in his ears. They must be doing five knots at the very least. In minutes they would be across the Boars.

With the tiller resting in the crook of his elbow, he fetched out his pipe and scraped the dottle with the point of his clasp knife. He charged the pipe with black, juicy plug, pressing it level with his thumb. He then struck a match and shielded the flame from the wind with his large calloused hands. He was enjoying the first blissful puffs when he noticed that the pressure of the helm on his arm was easing. He looked up quickly and saw an ominous flutter in the luff of the mainsail.

It was one of those freak lulls that occurred from time to time in the Firth. He could see that the wind was blowing strongly all around them, but for the moment they were in a pocket of almost complete calm.

He did not have to warn his brothers of their peril. Jimmie and Weelum immediately unshipped two large oars and rowed as though the fiends out of the pit were on their tail.

They made slow progress.

In full ballast with five hundredweight of fish on top, it was practically impossible to row the yawl. The sweat poured down

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their cheeks on to their jerseys. Jock could do nothing: he had to sit at the helm and keep what little wind there was in the sails.

Cat's-paws came raking in from their aft quarter. Jimmie and Weelum saw them about the same moment as Jock. They immediately heaved in their oars and grabbed the sheets.

With a clap of thunder the sails filled, and the yawl buried down until the lee deck was almost completely under water. The pressure eased as the yawl gained speed and all sheets were hauled in until the ropes groaned. Jock had never sailed the boat so hard. She thundered through the seas, masts screaming in protest as they bent like willows to the force of the canvas.

There was now no longer the even motion of the waves: the seas were becoming choppy and broken. Every now and again a streamer of spray clawed up the sails, mast high.

"I doot the Boars are risin'." Jock had to bellow into Weelum's ear to make himself heard. Weelum was sitting on the after thwart, a length of sheet coiled round his hand. He looked out to the weather side where the seas were now boiling like a witch's cauldron.

"Aye, there's a bit o' a brogle gettin' in the sea noo," he said, wiping the salt spray from his nose with the back of his hand.

Jock was one of the greatest seamen of his time. He knew every tide and every eddy in the Firth, but this was a situation outside his experience. Few who got caught in the Boars ever came out again.

When he was a little boy there was a favourite story he pestered his grandfather to tell him, over and over again, beside the peat fire on a winter's evening. It concerned a certain Sammie o' the Burnside who was a great seaman in his day. Once he had missed his tide almost exactly as Jock had done today, and had been caught in the Boars. He was the only one in living memory who had ever come back.

Sammie never spoke of his experience and he had never gone to sea again. He had spent the rest of his days pottering about the cabbage plot. In the still of a summer's evening Jock's grandfather, who was at that time only a boy, would sometimes hear Sammie mutter to himself, "It's the wells that dis it . . . it's the wells that drags ye under."

Once he had screwed up courage to ask Sammie what he meant by saying, "It's the wells that dis it . . ." Sammie had turned a lobster red and made as though to strike, but at the last minute relented. He then, for the only time in his life, spoke of his experience in the Boars.

"When I got caught in the Boars that day, Johnnie," he had

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said, "I thought me time hid come for certain. The seas sprang up a' aboot me lek a roost." Then he had fixed Johnnie with a beady eye, poking a horny finger into his chest, and had continued in a hoarse whisper, punctuating each syllable with stabs of his forefinger.

"But it wasna' the seas that wid ha' sunk me, Johnnie, it wasna' the seas—it was the wells. They whirlpools that spring up ony place an' drag ye doon."

His eyes had dimmed and his face had gone haggard with the memory.

"It's the wells that dis it . . ." He had again lapsed into muttering dotage.

"But how did ye manage tae git oot o' the wells, Sammie?" Johnnie had persevered. Sammie had slowly shaken his head and continued muttering. Johnnie had tugged at one of the gnarled hands and implored, "How did ye git oot o' the wells, Sammie? Please tell me how ye got oot alive."

Then Sammie had looked into the eager young face and, for a moment, the sea-dog fire burnt in the old eyes.

"When the first well cam' at me and I felt the stern go under, I picked up the nearest bit o' ballast I could git me hands on an' threw it doon the throat o' the well." Sammie paused, and black hatred burnt in the depths of his eyes. "I killed 'im. I killed 'im," he repeated with glee. "Whenever a well cam' at me I threw anither bit o' ballast doon 'is throat—an', I tell ye, I killed 'im."

Then he continued in a sadder tone, "It was the finest catch I hid ever hauled, but it hid tae go—doon the throat o' the last well, and then I was in the open sea."

People had said that it was the ramblings of dotage, but it was the only story that had ever passed the lips of the one man who had come through the Boars, and lived . . .

A white froth churned all round the *Three Brothers* and she tossed and turned and thrashed about like a stag at bay. Tongues of spray hissed up at the sails and broken seas roared over the decks, spilling into the well of the boat. It was impossible to steer a course. All Jock could do was to keep the sails filled as best he could.

Weelum looked out again to the weather side. A blanket of driven spume gathered round them, and he could see no farther than a boat's length through the spray.

Weelum, too, had heard many times the tale of Sammie's escape from the wells. If the story was true then it was not the mountains of broken sea, terrifying though they were, but the wells wherein the mortal danger lay.

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He eased the foresail sheet a fraction, and for the first and only time in his life tied it. He secured it firmly to a cleat on the afterdeck. He had been taught with his alphabet that never, under any circumstances, should he belay a sheet. In the gusty and uncertain winds of the Firth, lives had been lost time and again because of this foolhardiness.

With the sheet securely fastened and his hands free, he selected a large ballast stone weighing the best part of a hundredweight, and placed it upon his knees.

Jock looked anxiously at the foresail, but he knew what was in his brother's mind. He knew—they all knew—that they were now fighting for their lives. It was a question of weighing the hazards one against the other . . .

A sound, different from the screeching din all about him, caught his ears. It was as if the plug had been pulled from a giant sink and the waters were gurgling down the waste-pipe. An invisible force pulled at the stern of the yawl, dragging it under. He looked over his shoulder and saw, just beyond the aft quarter, an enormous whirlpool coning down into the depths of the ocean. They were already on the periphery of the swirling waters and the stern of the boat slewed round out of control.

With the tail of his eye he saw Weelum toss the ballast stone straight down the throat of the well. At once the pressure eased and the seas closed in.

Before they had recovered from the shock of the first well, another came racing in on the weather bow. Weelum again threw a stone straight and true, and the well dispersed. The wells were now springing up all round them, and again and yet again Weelum tossed the ballast with unerring aim.

They were now in a green night: streamers of water shooting up all around. Broken seas pounded in from every quarter. Jimmie belayed the jib sheet and, with a large pail, baled like a madman. The yawl thrashed about, timbers groaning, a creature in mortal agony.

The last ballast stone had gone. Weelum was astride the after thwart, the basket of fish in his hands. Another whirlpool came roaring in from the weather quarter, and five hundredweight of fish went down into the vortex. It was the last throw; there was now nothing left to offer, and they were still in the boiling roost. They couldn't be far from the edge of the Boars. If only they had some more ballast . . .

Jock was grim-faced, one hand firmly clasping the helm, the other holding the main sheet. There was a familiar, ominous roar from the after quarter. He didn't have to look to know what it was . . . it was no good, they weren't going to make it

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after all. The missus and the bairns . . . he felt the grating of his pipe-stem as he clenched his teeth.

Weelum had moved from the thwart and was now sitting on the gunwale. His face was red with exertion and wet with constant drenching by the salt spray, but in his eyes there was a look of serenity, almost of bliss, as though he was seeing faraway things.

Jock felt the yawl bury down as the racing waters approached. He caught a glimpse of his brother balanced precariously on the gunwale before disappearing over the side. It was not a graceful dive. He turned a clumsy backward somersault, all eighteen stone of him, but he landed plumb in the centre of the whirlpool.

Sandy o' the Breck had returned and was spreading the news that the Norquoy boys had been caught in the Boars. Work in the fields had stopped and men gathered in knots, anxious eyes scanning the Firth. Every now and again a pitying glance was directed towards a lonely figure, draped in a shawl, a telescope held steadily to her eye.

Then something whiter than the wavecrests came bobbing into view.

" Surely that's the *Three Brothers*," a voice proclaimed.

" That it is," chorused several others, and there was a shaking of heads in disbelief.

" There's Jock at the helm, straight as a ramrod," said the first voice.

" Aye, an' that'll be Jimmie balin' there forrad," said another.

" I wonder whar' Weelum's hidin' that broad backside o' his," said a third, loudly applauding his own wit.

The yawl momentarily straightened up, permitting a clear view inside. It could now be seen that there were only two men in the boat. The laughter died suddenly, and a great stillness fell upon the watchers. Heads were uncovered and eyes looked down towards the earth in silent prayer.

A lonely woman folded up her telescope and walked slowly back towards her home. © William Nicholson 1960

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 144

Across. 1, *Carthaginians.* 10, *Hundred.* 11, *Peevish.* 12, *Fast.* 13, *Abbot.* 14, *Beam.* 17, *Ivanhoe.* 18, *Sitwell.* 19, *Gallows.* 22, *Escapes.* 24, *Arum.* 25, *Corfu.* 26, *Mean.* 29, *Dodging.* 30, *Numbers.* 31, *Proportionate.*

Down. 2, *Amnesia.* 3, *Tare.* 4, *Audible.* 5, *Impious.* 6, *Ibex.* 7, *Naivete.* 8, *Shifting Sands.* 9, *Shamelessness.* 15, *Throb.* 16, *Stick.* 20, *Launder.* 21, *Sponger.* 22, *Effendi.* 23, *Prefect.* 27, *Limp.* 28, *Amen.*

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DAVENPORT BALLROOM

There'd been a formidable scandal—nearly a diplomatic incident

BY NICHOLAS DEE

IT was a huge, cold, classic house. Out of whichever window you looked, the prospect insulted you by its beauty. The park was landscaped by Capability Brown, and gave the desolating impression that none of its splendour had been left to chance; no wonder my aunt found it almost intolerable.

Imagine her, summer after summer, watching the rain, while the haunting scent of wistaria drifted in over chilly, sweating marble; imagine her eating her solitary meals under the bored gaze of the Van Dycks and the Gainsboroughs, so much less beautiful, so much more presentable than she. She was Turkish by birth; there had been a formidable scandal, nearly a diplomatic incident, when my Uncle Robert, Lord Lavingham, abducted her from the harem of a Pasha who was high in favour with the Sultan, and had to leave Constantinople hurriedly by night. The matter was smoothed over, and he took Ferideh to England and married her.

Her beauty was murderous—I can think of no other adjective that comprehends all its scimitar-like fineness and sharpness—and her boredom was scarifying. She had been brought up among the intrigues and complexities of a harem where she held a position of power and authority; here she was no one. She was a woman of high intellect and culture, used to command; here there was nobody to command except the sheep and the peacocks and the herds of deer moving aimlessly about the drizzling distances. She soon reached the humiliating conclusion that her husband really preferred his own thoughts and company to anything she could offer.

He was an erudite man, passionately interested in archaeology; he had not quite forgiven her the fact that he was no longer persona grata in Turkey and was deprived of the chance to finish some excavations he had begun in Anatolia. After a year at home he went off to Greece; and left his wife in England.

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It would have been better for her with a child to occupy her time. Robert had, with his usual practical sense, made her leave Gharuzi, her year-old baby, behind in the haremlik, under the care of an aged dadi; it was unfortunate that Ferideh heard a report, a year later, of the child's murder by Naraya, her chief rival in the harem.

Robert was in Greece at the time; there was no one she could talk to. I was staying in the house, a thin, pale, precocious boy of ten. I had been ill with jaundice and sent to Lavingham for country air. So she confided in me.

I was eating my supper in the Grinling Gibbons room, shivering under its grandeurs one cold, raw summer evening when she swept in and began walking up and down in front of the three long windows, obscuring each vista in turn. I watched her between bites of bread-and-milk. She was very pale; her great lambent grey eyes seemed to look through and beyond me. I felt vaguely that something was wrong.

Uneasily I finished the bread-and-milk, trying not to scrape with my spoon on the bowl, and started nibbling dried French plums, listening to the regular swish and sweep of her skirt; she was wearing a long swathed dress of sea-blue silk and had resumed the carsaf over her head which Robert had persuaded her to abandon when she first came to England; her eyes glittered above it. Suddenly she whipped round and came over to my table. She put her small beautiful fists, flashing with rings, on either side of my plate and leaned forward, staring at me.

"My baby has been murdered," she said coldly. "What do you think of that?" She spoke English without a trace of accent, but somehow created the impression that she was giving the words a slightly different meaning from the accustomed one.

My answer was lame enough. "Your baby, Aunt Ferideh? I never knew you had one."

"Gharuzi would have been nearly three years old now."

"I am very sorry," I said unhappily. The unfamiliarity of her grief was terrible to me: it was like a first encounter, close to, with a force powerful enough to kill.

Indeed, next moment she said, "Supposing I were to have *you* poisoned?"

Her eyes flashed at me. I looked doubtfully at the French plums. I couldn't believe she really meant it; any more than I could believe that some day Lavingham would belong to me. The one fate seemed as undeserved and irrelevant as the other. But just the same I was frightened of her, and greatly relieved when she added, "Don't look so anxious. I do not intend to. After all, this is England, isn't it? And such things do not

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happen in England." She looked out angrily at the placid deer.

"What shall you do?" I asked. With a child's unquestioning acceptance, I never thought of asking where the baby had been, or the circumstances of his death.

"Do? Nothing. What could I do?"

She walked away and went into the little green-panelled room where a spinet stood. My uncle had had her taught music in the Western mode; he liked to have her play Rameau or Couperin to him while he sat two or three rooms away deciphering inscriptions, the music making a faint, tinkling background to his absorption.

Feeling that something was demanded of me, though I knew myself unequal to the occasion, I went and sat near her while she played out her unhappiness in this equivocal manner. The sad watery cadences slipped through the room and out of the window, which was almost obscured by the leaves of a great vine growing outside.

Presently I suggested, "Why don't you run away?"

She rapped down the lid angrily. "Where should I run to?"

I never heard the death of her baby referred to again, except once, obliquely.

Robert had imported from Burma a pair of peacocks of a particularly rare and brilliant variety. We were in the black and white marble room admiring them through the windows as they strolled and preened on the terrace.

"When the sun shines on them they really do seem to throw gleams of coloured light on to the stone," he said in his deliberating manner. "I am very glad I got them. They set off Brown's landscape to perfection."

"And of course there was no need to ask if they minded losing all they had," Ferideh exclaimed with concentrated bitterness, "in order to come and grace your terrace, my dear Lord Lavingham."

He turned and looked at her. He was a tall man, and I realise now that they must both have been quite young still, though they seemed elderly to me then: he moved and thought slowly, and his hair was just faintly greying, but Ferideh, wild, pacing, and restless, sparkled like the peacocks.

"I consider that remark uncalled for," he said stiffly, and then added, as if his statement had dealt with the situation, "are we driving to Courcy this afternoon?"

"You may be. I have my fencing lesson at three."

She had taken up fencing, I suppose to allay in some measure her desperate need for a stimulus, and a master came down from London three times a week to teach her. She rapidly acquired

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all his art, and it was beautiful to see her practise, in black tights and loose white shirt, pale, fierce, and absorbed, graceful as a heron, her épée point flickering in a wreath of light.

She and Robert slept at opposite ends of the great house; this was a thing that vaguely puzzled me for I had understood that married people always slept in the same room.

Next to Ferideh's room was the old indoor tennis court, and she had had this fitted up as a fencing gymnasium. I used to watch from the gallery and I knew what she did not, that Robert, too, often came softly and watched from the shadows at the back while she was practising. He himself was an expert with the sword but, either because it was beneath his dignity to fence with a woman, or because of the unspoken barrier between them, he never fenced with her. I used to wish that he would.

A month after he had brought home the peacocks he was off again to Egypt. As usual I was invited to Lavingham to keep her company. Nobody called on her; at first the ladies of the county had been too terrified by the word *odalisque*, and by the time they summoned up their resolution and decided she was harmless, Ferideh had formed her own views of them, and haughtily kept them at bay. The state rooms were shut up, and she moved between boudoir, music room, and fencing court.

On this visit I discovered that she had acquired a new pastime: archery. Beyond the park boundaries were the ruins of a medieval abbey, and here she had commanded one of the gardeners to set her up a target. The long, grassy nave of the abbey chapel made a good shooting-range. She took me with her every day, and I used to lie on the grass and watch her shooting, savage and intent, in the hot, quiet, walled-in place. Sometimes I shot too, but I could nowhere near equal her strength or skill.

"Why do you have to come so far for your archery?" I grumbled once. "Why can't you shoot in the tennis court or the paved garden?"

"I like this place," she said, turning her shining grey eyes on me. "I like it because it doesn't belong to Robert. He can't do anything to it. He can't put peacocks in here."

What she had forgotten was that the ruins did not belong to her either. They were, as a matter of fact, public property: the ground on which they stood had been declared common land. One day when we arrived we were astonished to see that the whole of the west wall, where Ferideh's target had hung, was covered with the most amazing drawings—chariots drawn by winged fish, nymphs and satyrs, gods and devils, pumpkins bursting open and spewing out dragons.

"It must be the work of some madman," Ferideh said angrily,

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looking about for her target, which had been thrown in a corner. With my help she hung it up again, against a writhing knot of ladies.

She had gone to the other end of the ruin and was just about to shoot her first arrow when a young man strolled in through one of the gaps in the walls, unslung a painting-satchel from his shoulder, and moved along the cartoons, examining them intently.

"Watch out or you will be hit," Ferideh called in her cold, clear voice, and without giving him much time to get out of the way she loosed her bow and sent an arrow hissing past him. It hit the target with a satisfying tock! and she pulled another from her quiver.

The man spun round as if he had been stung and shouted something indignant. Ferideh took no notice; she fired her second shaft. Her hand must have shaken slightly though, for the arrow went wide of the target and knocked a chip off a dragon.

"Stop!" the man called. He started towards her, keeping to the side of her line of fire, however.

"Why should I stop?" Ferideh said calmly. She fired a third arrow.

By this time he had reached her and stood angrily facing her.

"Because you might have killed me! And you are r-ruining my picture!" He was white and stammering with rage.

As they faced each other I was reminded of two gamecocks spoiling for a fight. He was a thin young man, about Ferideh's age and height, with a mobile expressive face and a pair of brilliant dark eyes.

"The ruins don't belong to you."

"Nor to you."

"I am Lady Lavingham," Ferideh said. I think it was the first time she had ever made use of her title.

"I don't care if you're Lady Beelzebub. It's not your abbey. You have no right to fire arrows into my picture."

"I shall fire as many as I please." She pulled one out of her quiver as she spoke, and nocked it on to the string.

He seized her wrist and for a moment or two I could hear them breathing hard as they stood almost breast to breast. "There are plenty of other places where you could shoot," he said reasonably after a pause. "Why can't you find somewhere else?"

"Why can't you paint somewhere else?"

"Where, for instance?" he said bitterly.

"You can paint all over my ballroom walls for all I care," Ferideh said. Then she added with an air of inspiration, "I know. We shall have a shooting contest to decide who has the right to use this place."

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" I'm shortsighted," he objected. " I can't shoot."

" A duel, then. Can you fence? "

" Yes, I can." He was considerably astonished.

" Very well. If I win I shall continue shooting here. If you win, you can have the ballroom for your pictures. You can paint the Day of Judgment there if you want to."

" Where shall we fight? " he said, staring at her.

" Oh, at home, over there." She waved a hand towards one of the gaps in the wall, through which Lavingham House could be seen, frowning on its knoll. " I will fight you at midnight."

" At midnight? Why not before? "

" Oh, the servants," she said impatiently. " They watch and follow and whisper. I do not like it. Come now; I will show you a small door through which you can enter tonight. The child here will let you in."

It was the first time either of them had glanced in my direction.

We walked back to the house in silence. I can still remember the walk. It was one of those grey days of early summer when the green of the leaves outshines the sky. The grass and every tree blazed pure emerald. Without the cloudy skeins and drifts of white hawthorn here and there the colour would have been almost too brilliant to bear. Ferideh ignored it, but the short-sighted young painter walked slowly with eyes dazzled and unfocused, like a man introduced to oxygen after a lifetime spent in a cellar.

" This is it," she said presently, pointing out the door which led from the orangery into the park. " The child will be here at five minutes to midnight to let you in."

I was glad that I was to be included in this adventure.

At midnight, after opening the orangery door, I took up my usual station in the gallery of the fencing court. Despite Ferideh's plan to avoid the servants' notice, not long after the first clash of steel I heard an outraged hiss and, turning, saw old Amos, the steward. I was not surprised. He followed Ferideh everywhere.

" The hussy! " he wheezed, while his bulbous little eyes, watching the fighters, slid from side to side like drops of rain on a railing. " I knew she'd do something like this sooner or later."

I did not care what he thought or muttered so long as he kept quiet and refrained from interrupting the duel. I loved watching swordplay. Perhaps he was hoping that Lady Lavingham would be killed; in any case he did not make his presence known, but waited until the painter had pricked Ferideh, not very seriously, in the arm, and then shuffled away, fulminating to himself against foreign harlots.

" You fight well," Ferideh said, calmly binding up the scratch

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in her arm. " I shall practise with you often. You have a better style than my fencing master.

" Come now and I will show you the ballroom. There are some mirrors on the walls but you can have them removed if you wish—or paint round them. It makes no difference."

I ran down from my post and sidled after them. Ferideh carried a taper into the ballroom and began lighting the candles in their gilt sconces along the walls. " My husband had this room redecorated," she said carelessly. " He put in all these white and gold panels. I find them too plain. You could paint your pictures on them and in my opinion this would improve them. What is your name, by the way? I cannot always address you as *you*."

" Matthew Davenport," he answered in an absent tone, his eyes taking in the immense, beautifully proportioned stretches of white and gold between the Florentine mirrors. " Yes, these walls will do excellently for the kind of work I have in mind. I will paint between the mirrors. When can I begin? "

" Tomorrow—or now if you wish." She was standing beside him in a negligent attitude. A silk scarf slung round her neck held the hurt arm across her breast. I think it was the first time he had been close enough to see her distinctly. I saw his eyes widen as he looked at her and began to realise her fierce and flickering beauty.

" Will you pose for me, Lady Lavingham? "

" If you like," she said, smiling a little. I could see that they were beginning to be interested and pleased with one another, and as I now felt extremely sleepy I decided to slip away to bed.

This was one of Lord Lavingham's longer periods of absence from home, and several months went by, enough time for Mr. Davenport to complete his series of paintings in the ballroom before my uncle returned.

During these months Ferideh and the young painter were constantly together. They talked, they fenced, and walked in the gardens, and he made countless sketches of her while she practised archery or swordplay. I think he taught her to live more at ease with herself, and to think more kindly of Robert.

Not long after his arrival I noticed—with a child's non-comprehending perception—a curious change in their relationship. They became both more relaxed with one another and more withdrawn, as if they knew each other's weaknesses. I saw that this change was connected in some way with an amethyst ring which passed between them one day, but I did not understand its significance.

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During his painting sessions in the ballroom—which often lasted from first light all through the day—she was always there, watching him, or playing her spinet, which she had had carried in, or merely stretched on an ottoman, gazing at the ceiling or out of the window, but nevertheless vividly aware of all he did.

Much of the time old Amos was there too, watching through some door-slit or peephole, and when he could not spy on them he deputed me to do so. "Oh, what wouldn't I give to be able to tell the master about these goings-on," he muttered over and over. "If only I knew where he'd gone this time I'd soon have him back and that Jezebel pitched out neck and crop. Just imagine Lavingham House ever belonging to a brat of hers!"

For a long time I had been living with the idea that Lavingham would one day belong to me, and this remark made me look at my Aunt Ferideh in a new light. I began to wander anxiously among the treasures which I had almost come to regard as mine already—the great Lavingham diamond, arrogantly displayed with no more protection than a crystal case, the illuminated *Canterbury Tales*, the fabulous silver and tortoiseshell and pictures and tapestries. It seemed queer that they might perhaps fall into the hands of another child.

My uncle arrived home in his usual way, suddenly and unheralded in the middle of the night. Ferideh and Davenport were fencing in the gymnasium and I was watching them from the gallery. Suddenly I heard a vitriolic and tortoise-like whispering behind me in the gloom—

". . . always at it, night and day, and never did my old eyes think to see the time when it would be so. Well! Your Lordship can see for yourself. Scandal there'd have been over the whole countryside if I hadn't told the other servants they'd be dismissed did they so much as breathe a word. If you'll believe me, my lord, this house has been nothing better than a—a Hotbed since you went away!"

"Indeed," said my uncle, following with his eyes the sweep and rejoinder of Ferideh's white sleeve. A Hotbed, I thought. What a curious name for this bleak storehouse of grandeur.

"But there! Your Lordship can see for yourself. Caught redhanded, as you may say."

Redhanded it certainly was, for as Amos spoke Ferideh, who from constant practice with him had come to excel Davenport in the art of fence, wounded her opponent in the shoulder. He staggered, slipped, and fell, but tried to get up.

"Stay still!," she said sharply, and knelt by him examining the wound, which she proceeded to tie up with matter-of-fact vigour. At this point my uncle walked down the gallery steps.

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"Is this not," he suggested coldly, "rather a strange time to be practising swordplay?"

Ferideh seemed quite pleased to see him. "Robert!" she said. "I was wondering when you would come home. I have a surprise for you."

Old Amos brushed past them, exclaiming, "Now I suppose she's killed him, good Lord! And then what do we do, that's what I want to know?"

"Of course I haven't killed him," Ferideh snapped, wiping her hands on a clean napkin. "Matthew! Open your eyes. Amos, will you go and fetch some brandy instead of standing there gobbling like an old turkey."

"Yes, go, Amos," said my uncle. "And take the brandy to the little saloon. The young man is perfectly capable of walking there."

Amos left, darting a glance of hate at Ferideh. She calmly helped Davenport to his feet.

"Introduce me," said my uncle.

"Mr. Matthew Davenport. My husband, Lord Lavingham."

My uncle bowed politely. Davenport, never a one for ceremony, nodded with some impatience and then said eagerly, "I have been hoping to see you in order to ask where you found the statue in the black-and-white room. It is a most interesting piece."

"Savage work," said my uncle in a dismissing manner. "I picked it up in north Africa. But let us go to the saloon. I believe we have things to talk about."

I followed them. The most direct route lay through the ballroom, which was brilliantly lit, as Davenport had been putting the finishing touches to his murals that evening. I heard my uncle draw in his breath sharply and the expression on his face was that of a man who has taken a mouthful of salt or lemon juice but is determined not to betray the fact.

"This is my surprise," said Ferideh, gesturing round at the painted Judgment Day.

One curious thing about this work was that all the figures, both the damned souls writhing in torment and the righteous rejoicing, both the malicious fiends with their flames and pincers, and the cohorts of saints coming down in splendour to receive the souls of the blessed, all these different characters had the face of Ferideh, but in so many different casts of expression that there was no monotony but a wonderful variation of beauty, sometimes tragic, sometimes distorted, sometimes tender, and always surpassing.

Although she had watched the painting from the start, Ferideh looked round the room almost wonderingly, as if she were really

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seeing it for the first time. " I had it done for you, Robert," she said. " In memory of me." She smiled her slight smile and did a thing that was rare for her—she moved to my uncle and laid her hand for a moment on his.

He politely withdrew from her. " I should like you to explain one thing," he said. " And that is why, as Amos tells me, during these last four months, you have been so closely in this young man's company as to give rise to indiscreet suppositions."

Amos came doddering in with the brandy, listened with an unsatisfied air to the last words, and left in obedience to a gesture from my uncle, saying meaningly, " If you want me, my lord, I shall be *within call*."

" Why? " said Ferideh. " Why not? Oh, do you mean that *you* suspect me? Of infidelity? I suppose that evil old man whispered the very blackest tales into your ear." She sounded slightly amused. " It is not like that at all, I assure you."

" I am waiting for your explanation," said my uncle.

" It is this," said Ferideh. She crossed to Mr. Davenport, who was seated on a gilt fauteuil sipping his brandy and looking abstractedly at a fine portrait by Lely of Arabella, wife of the ninth earl.

Ferideh began pulling things out of Mr. Davenport's pockets—two gold snuffboxes, some small rock-crystal figurines, silver teaspoons, and a coral and bells reputed to have belonged to Edward VI. " He can't help stealing things," she explained. " I think it is a kind of disease with him. One cannot safely leave him alone because he will take anything small."

" It is a disease," said Mr. Davenport complacently. " One day they will find a name for it."

My uncle began to laugh.

He had absently given me a glass of brandy, the first I had ever tasted, and it had gone to my head. It seemed to me that my uncle's face was greatly improved by this laughter, and I laughed too. Lord Lavingham turned to me.

" Do you confirm this tale? " he asked. I nodded.

" In that case," said my uncle, " as my nerves are not strong, I would prefer that you leave my house tonight, Mr. Davenport. I am very fond of my possessions and it distresses me to think of losing any. I am sure you will understand this point of view. I will pay you a thousand guineas, which shall be sent to your lodgings tomorrow, for the highly original work you have done in my ballroom, and I wish you a very good night." He raised his voice. " Amos! Will you show the young gentleman out? "

Amos shuffled in, greatly grieved and disappointed that there was not to be further bloodshed.

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" And Ferideh, my dear," said my uncle, when Mr. Davenport had been shown out, blowing his hostess a kiss, " you are not the only one with a surprise. I have brought something home for you. Come."

He led her up the stairs to one of the bedrooms in the east wing. I was some distance behind them, floating slowly upwards in a golden mist of brandy. I did not see what the surprise was that my uncle showed Ferideh, but heard her give a queer, small, broken cry of love and rapture.

" Hush," said my uncle, " hush, you will wake her. She has had a long journey."

They came out of the room again and passed me, going towards the stairs. Ferideh walked like a dazed person, her arm in my uncle's, her face radiant and unseeing, masked with tears. He gave me a little sideways nod, as if to say Go to bed, and I did so.

Later in the night I awoke, very thirsty, and heard sounds coming from my uncle's room nearby. Rather aggrievedly I looked through the doorway to see what he was doing. To my surprise he was not there and his bed had not been slept in, but there was a small black-haired child in a cot, sitting up and looking about with huge frightened eyes. She was shivering and apprehensive, and could say nothing when I spoke to her save the word " Gharuzi," which appeared to be her name.

There seemed to be nothing for it but to stay and comfort her.

Relations were greatly improved between Ferideh and my Uncle Robert after that day—even when it was discovered that Mr. Davenport had forgotten to leave his address and could not therefore be paid his thousand guineas.

Although later on I succeeded my uncle to the title, I cannot really claim that I achieved my ambition to be master of Lavingham, as I married my step-cousin Gharuzi—whom my uncle had with some difficulty spirited away from Constantinople—and for the last forty years she has ruled me with a rod of iron.

The Davenport ballroom, now almost beyond price as an artistic rarity, is still in a very good state of preservation, although to his dying day my uncle detested it, and kept it in being only as what he considered a very poor exchange for the Lavingham diamond, which the forgetful Mr. Davenport had taken away with him.

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SUMMING UP

Secretary: a girl who may not be able to add but who can certainly distract.

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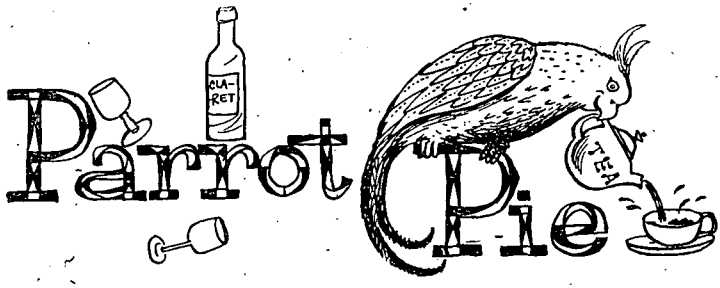

Once there was a little Parret
And his name was Mr. Barret.
Sometimes he liket tea
And sometimes he liket claret.

ELIZABETH JENKINS, *Young Enthusiasts*

Some new neighbours, that came a month or two ago, brought with them an accumulation of all the things to be guarded against in a London neighbourhood, viz., a pianoforte, a lap-dog, and a parrot.

JANE WELSH CARLYLE, *Letter, 5th May* 1839

With my becke bent, my lyttyl wanton eye,
My fedders fresh as is the emrawde green,
About my neck a cyrculet lyke the ryche rubye,
My lyttyll leggys, my feet both fete and clene,
I am a mynyon to wayt upon a quene;
My proper Parrot, my lyttyl pretty foole,
With ladyes I lerne and go with them to scole.

JOHN SKELTON, 1460-1529

Stowaways at Liverpool

Liverpool branch of the R.S.P.C.A. today saved 14 Amazon parrots from destruction in one of the strangest "stowaway cases" in the history of this port.

Customs men began their routine search of the Booth liner *Hubert* soon after she reached Liverpool from Manaos and other South American ports .... Guided by loud squawkings they found four parrots perching in an empty cabin which had not been assigned to anyone.

A customs officer pointed out that parrots are liable to a

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10 per cent import duty. Each one was valued at £80, so that someone had to produce £32 for the Revenue. No one would acknowledge responsibility for the birds; they were not mentioned in the ship's manifest: officers denied all knowledge of them; the crew looked blank when asked.

Customs men made a further search and produced 10 more chattering, screeching parrots. They said the birds must not be landed until £112 duty was paid. Then came the order that they must be destroyed and the Liverpool branch of the R.S.P.C.A. was asked to carry it out.

The society's inspectors said that the birds were healthy and they declined to kill them . . . The society has undertaken not to make any commercial profit out of the birds, and proposes to give them to old people, pensioners, or hospitals for children when they are out of quarantine.

An official said: " They are fine young birds and should make good talkers."

From The Times, 30th May 1960

Sagacious Friend

Near this corner lies a well beloved
Parrot rich in talk oracular and wise
Struck in about the fortieth year of
her age by an ill-omened chill of May
month she went down the darkling way
to that place set apart for Pious
Birds such as was she—the year MCMVII

Epitaph for a Parrot buried in Somerset
Translated from the Latin by Hilaire Belloc

Quick Pupils—

The Khama Sutra, the ancient Indian book of lore, gives more than forty instructions to " strengthen the character and produce tranquillity of mind." One of them prescribes, " Two half-hours a day teaching the Parrot to talk."

—Or Slow?

The Parrot is so slow in wits,
He eats the perch on which he sits
—to check which habit, the Almighty
Ordained a perch of lignum vitae.

ANON

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Wicked Words

" Come away, Hawkins," Long John Silver would say; " come and have a yarn with John. Sit you down and hear the news. Here's Cap'n Flint—I calls my parrot Cap'n Flint, after the famous buccaneer—here's Cap'n Flint predicting success to our v'yage. Wasn't you, cap'n?"

And the parrot would say, with great rapidity, " Pieces of eight! Pieces of eight! Pieces of eight! " till you wondered that it was not out of breath, or till John threw his handkerchief over the cage.

" Now, that bird," he would say " is, maybe two hundred years old, Hawkins—they lives for ever mostly; and if anybody's seen more wickedness, it must be the devil himself . . . She's been at Madagascar, and at Malabar, and Surinam, and Providence, and Portobello. She was at the fishing up of the wrecked Plate ships. It's there she learned " Pieces of eight," and little wonder; three hundred and fifty thousand of 'em, Hawkins! She was at the boarding of the Viceroy of the Indies out of Goa, she was; and to look at her you would think she was a babby. But you smelt powder—didn't you, cap'n?"

" Stand by to go about," the parrot would scream.

" Ah, she's a handsome craft, she is," the cook would say, and give her sugar from his pocket, and then the bird would peck at the bars and swear straight on, passing belief for wickedness.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON, *Treasure Island*

Vocal Birds

The Parrot and the Carrot one may easily confound
They're very much alike in looks,
and similar in sound,
We recognise the Parrot by his
clear articulation,
For Carrots are unable to engage in conversation.

ROBERT WILLIAMS WOOD,
How To Tell the Birds From the Flowers

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SHANDY LIL

Uncle Silas smacked his lips—
in fruitier recollection

BY H. E. BATES

I REMEMBER a July afternoon in my Uncle Silas' garden when the raspberries were as big as walnuts and very nearly black. Where sun and shade met on the edge of the hazel spinney a line quivered all afternoon like pure white fire and far and deep under the trees the shade was black too.

We were supposed to be gathering raspberries for jam-making, but I was eating most of mine as I picked them and Silas wasn't working very hard either. He was lying flat on his back between the tall dark rows of canes with his head on his rolled-up jacket and a soft straw hat on his face.

Now and then he lifted up the rim of the straw hat like a trap-door and dropped a raspberry into his mouth, smacking his wet red lips with the sound of a clapper.

" These 'ere raspberries remind me of Pikey Willis," he said. " Can't justly recollect if I ever told you about Pikey, did I? "

No, I said, I had never heard of this Pikey.

" Big man," my Uncle Silas said. " Onaccountable big and red. Very hairy too. Looked as if he'd got half a sheaf o' barley growing on the backs of his hands. Had a big red beard too. Just like a fox's brush dangling on his chops."

After this he popped another raspberry into his mouth and shook his head thoughtfully and then surprised me by saying that he'd always felt onaccountable sorry for Pikey.

" Very strong man, Pikey," he said. " Could lift a twenty-score sow wi' one hand."

I didn't say a solitary word to this, largely because it seemed to me I had heard something remarkably like it before. In a moment, I felt, I should be listening to the epic history of how my Uncle Silas had floored Pikey the big boaster in a wrestling bout, had beaten him cold with raw fists in a fight of fifty rounds, or had put him under the table in a beer-drinking match after swallowing half a dozen barrels.

Instead I had another surprise.

" Very nice chap, Pikey," my Uncle Silas said. " Very quiet.

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Onaccountable shy and timid. Allers blushin'. Might have been a gal."

With a smack of his lips he popped another raspberry into his mouth and at the same time I remembered something. What about the raspberries? I said. What had they to do with Pikey?

"I wur comin' to that," he said, "if you'll let me git me breath."

And what was the reason, I said, for being sorry for Pikey?

"I wur comin' to that an' all," he said, "if you don't keep a-chivvyin' on me all the time."

If there was anybody less out of breath and less chivvied at that moment it was my Uncle Silas, lying flat on his back under his soft straw hat in the shade of the raspberry rows.

"You're allus in sich a nation tearing hurry to git on," he said. "Pipe down a minute. I'm a-recollectin' on it."

For the next few minutes, while my Uncle Silas lay sleepily lost in recollection, I lay down myself and stared up at the clear calm blue sky. Presently I heard him give a long slow ripe smack of his lips and say softly, "Yeller uns. Beautiful yeller uns they wur."

"Yellow what?" I said. I hadn't the faintest notion what he was talking about.

"Raspberries," he said. "The raspberries Pikey growed."

I had to confess I had never heard of yellow raspberries and he said, "Best flavour o' the lot. Beautiful an' sweet. Ain't so big, mind you, but lovely and soft. You don't see 'em growed much nowadays."

For the second time, perhaps a little impatiently, I said I had never heard of yellow raspberries.

"Neither had she," he said.

And who, I said, was she?

"Shandy Lil," he said. He smacked his lips again, softly this time, in what I thought was slower, riper, fruitier recollection. "Shandy Lil."

And who, I said again, was she?

"Pikey's gal," he said. "Any rate the gal he wur arter."

What was she like? I said.

"Never forgit it," he said with remarkable quickness. "Allus remember it. Beautiful hot evening, I'd bin a-mowin' a medder all day and I'd knocked down about seventeen pints and wur just orf to The Swan with Two Nicks for another quart or two."

In one quick leap my Uncle Silas was far ahead of me.

"Hardly got five minutes up the medder lane afore I come across Pikey," he said, "sitting on 'eap o' stones, tremblin' like a good un."

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At this point I tried to draw my Uncle Silas out by saying, as he so often reminded me himself, that that was just what women did to you, but he ignored this inviting remark completely.

" Nussin' a paper bag," he said. " Lookin' jist like a boy as'd bin caught bird's-nestin' and couldn't git rid o' th' eggs. Blushin' an' quiverin' an' quakin' all over."

Sucking at another raspberry almost black with bloom, he went on to say what a terrible thing it was to see a big strong chap like Pikey in such a nervous state. " I felt onaccountable sorry for him," he said, " and arter a bit I asked him what wur the matter."

After this he paused for so long that I was about to show my impatience again by asking exactly what was the matter when he lifted the straw hat rather sharply and said, " It ain't allus the strong uns as make a goo on it. Ain't allus the big uns. Strength ain't everythin'."

A go of what? I asked him. And who with?

" Wimmin," he said. " Pikey wadn't gittin' nowhere with that gal. He wur frit to death of her. Bin tryin' to speak to her for weeks. Heart failed him every time."

What was she like? I asked him again, this time firmly. Pretty?

" Her mother kept a pub over at Nether Dean," he said with that remarkable quick blandness again, not even lifting the straw hat.

" The Blacksmith's Arms. Seems Pikey used to goo over every night and 'ave a pint or two there and stare at this gal across the bar. That's all. Jist stare. Wadn't gittin' nowhere. Never said a word."

What was she like? I said again. Big? Fair?

" Dammit, man, how do I know what she wur like? " he said. " I 'adn't set eyes on her yit, 'ad I? I'm still a-sittin' on this 'ere 'eap o' stones with Pikey and this goodly bag o' raspberries, ain't I? "

His voice, though juicy, was quite acid and I lay back in silence between the raspberry rows, momentarily subdued.

" I'll outline her in a minute," he said, " if you'll hold hard. But I got to git there fust, ain't I? "

In the process of getting there my Uncle Silas dwelt for some time on the pitiful nature of the raspberries in the paper bag. They were Pikey's idea of a present to a girl, a sort of opening offering, but yellow or not, Silas said, they wouldn't do at all.

" 'Fust you got to wrap everything up, Pikey,' I told him. ' That's what wimmin like. Surprises. Unwrappin' things. A bit o' mystery. Next you got to roll up to that pub as if you *are* somebody. Git a trap and a spankin' little mare and drive up in

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that. Tie a bit o' ribbon on her tail and another bit on the whip and put a big Sweet William in your buttonhole. You'll never git nowhere crawlin' and tremblin' on your hands and knees. Wimmin don't like that.' "

All Pikey could do, it seemed, was to sit on the heap of stones and say, over and over again, " I dussn't do it, Silas, I dussn't do it. I ain't made that way."

By this time I had begun to feel quite a bit sorry for Pikey myself. There is nothing quite so touching as a shy, helpless, muscular man.

" What happened? " I said.

" Well," my Uncle Silas said, " when a chap don't know how to do his courtin' you best git on and show 'im. That's what I say."

Accordingly, two nights later, my Uncle Silas borrowed a trap and a little brown mare from a man named Joe Billington and tied a blue-and-yellow ribbon on the mare's tail and a crimson bow on the whip.

" Pikey picked a beautiful lot o' raspberries and I laid 'em on a nice bed o' leaves in a little bit of a flat basket. Then I covered 'em over with a bit o' white muslin and tied it on with blue ribbon and then slipped a few cornflowers round the handle and tied them on too. Then I put a big red rose in me buttonhole and a big pink-and-white Sweet William in Pikey's and we spanked off like a couple o' dukes gooin' off to the races."

This time I didn't ask what happened. Somehow I knew that when they got to The Blacksmith's Arms Pikey would sit in the trap outside, all of a tremble, and say, " I dussn't do it, Silas, I dussn't do it. I ain't made that way."

" Said it forty times if he said it once," my Uncle Silas said. " Couldn't git him into that bar nohow. Wild horses wouldn't git him in."

At this point I made the inviting suggestion that my Uncle Silas had naturally had no such misgivings but, reposing blandly under the straw hat, he ignored that invitation too.

" ' Pikey,' I said, ' you sit out here and hold the basket while I goo in an' coax her. I'll coax her the best I can and tell her all about you and arter a bit she'll come out and then *you* can coax her. You can take her up the lane for a ride and gather a bit o' honeysuckle. Beautiful honeysuckle I noticed on the edge o' that spinney back there. Nothing like a bit o' honeysuckle for coaxing gals.' "

When I asked how long the coaxing had taken and what had happened afterwards my Uncle Silas didn't even bother to raise the rim of his straw hat

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" It wur gittin' a bit dusk when we come out, I know that," he said. " It wur still nation hot and the mare wur a bit restless. But that wadn't all. Only thing in the trap wur th' basket. Pikey had done a bunk. Chap sittin' outside with his missus having a quart said he'd gone tearin' down the road as if his beard wur afire."

With slow care my Uncle Silas chose himself another raspberry. As he sucked it into his loose red lips it stained them with an almost purple smear.

" Growin' on a very tall hedge, that honeysuckle," he said. " Had a job to reach it."

" What was she like? " I started to say again. " Dark? What was she—? "

" Growin' up a big tall hedge, other side of a big dyke full o' meddersweet and willerherb and burnet and all that."

I didn't ask what she was like any more. For some reason I had made up my mind that she was dark and how nice she would have looked with golden fingers of honeysuckle in her hair.

" They say the best fruit's allus at the top o' the tree," Silas said. " So wur that honeysuckle. Too high for me. Couldn't git at it nohow."

With what I thought was some effort he managed a bit of a sigh.

" 'Ad to lift 'er up," he said. " On'y thing for it. 'Ad to lift her up."

Then he went on to say how light she was, light as a feather, and how he sat her on his shoulder. At first he clasped her round the legs but she laughed so much she couldn't sit still at all and she couldn't lift her arms. Then he put his hands round her waist and tried to lift her that way but the honeysuckle was still far out of reach and in the end they both fell down.

" Fust time she fell atop o' me in the meddersweet," he said. " Then we tried it again and I fell atop of her."

He sighed again, as if reliving, I thought, the long July dusk with the honeysuckle, the meadowsweet, and Shandy Lil. But suddenly he said, " That's why them yeller raspberries allus remind me of her."

" Oh, damn the raspberries! " I said. " I know all about the raspberries. What was *she* like, man? "

With solemn slowness he lifted an edge of his straw hat and cocked his eye at me.

" If you goo over to The Blacksmith's Arms at Nether Dean," he said, " you'll see a gal there behind the bar. That's Shandy's granddaughter."

" Anything like her? "

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"Spittin' image," he said. "Same white skin. Same light brown hair. Colour o' beer but not quite. More like a drop o' shandy. That's how she got her name."

He sighed again and from the spinney a breath of wind stirred the leaves and ran along the raspberry rows, blowing all the ripe fragrance of red-black fruit into the heat of afternoon.

"Beautiful white skin," he said. "Beautiful little figure." He held up a big ripe raspberry and contemplated the firm red cone of it in a musing dream. "Hadn't got a blemish on her nowhere."

"Nowhere?"

He chuckled for the last time, ripely.

"Not as far as I could see," he said, "but then it wur gittin' dark at the time."

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SOVEREIGN SEVEN

There's a bit of royalty in all of us, whether from eating queen-cakes or smoking king-size cigarettes, so drag up the throne to the fire, fill the crown with black coffee, put it on to simmer, and tackle our regal teasers. Answers, if stuck with the King's Evil, are to be found on page 94.

1. *All these chaps are royal, but can you name the territories over which they held sway?*
   i. The Ahkoond; ii. The Emir; iii. The Bey; iv. The Caliph; v. The Dey.
2. *Where is the Royal Mile?*
3. *Ladies could of course solve the following but can our preponderantly male readers identify:*
   a. Queen of the meadows;
   b. Queen of the woods.
4. *Who wrote: i. The King Must Die;*
   ii. The Queen and the Rebels;
   iii. The Faerie Queene?
5. *What colour are these roses?*
   a. Grace de Monaco;
   b. Sandringham;
   c. Cleopatra.
6. *Who are or were: i. The King of Beasts; ii. The King of Terrors; iii. The King of the Forest; iv. The King of Bath?*
7. *Royal, super royal, crown octavo—to what do these terms refer?*

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FOUR AND TWENTY BLACKBIRDS

Hercule Poirot sat up—
his green eyes flashed

BY AGATHA CHRISTIE

HERCULE POIROT was dining with his friend, Henry Bonnington, at the Gallant Endeavour in the King's Road, Chelsea.

Mr. Bonnington was fond of the Gallant Endeavour. He liked the leisurely atmosphere, he liked the food which was "plain" and "English" and "not a lot of made-up messes." He liked to tell people who dined with him there just exactly where Augustus John had been wont to sit and to draw their attention to the famous artists' names in the visitors' book. Mr. Bonnington was himself the least artistic of men—but he took a certain pride in the artistic activities of others.

Molly, the sympathetic waitress, greeted Mr. Bonnington as an old friend. She prided herself on remembering her customers' likes and dislikes in the way of food.

"Good evening, sir," she said, as the two men took their seats at a corner table. "You're in luck today—turkey stuffed with chestnuts—that's your favourite, isn't it? And ever such a nice Stilton we've got! Will you have soup first or fish?"

Mr. Bonnington deliberated the point. He said to Poirot warningly as the latter studied the menu, "None of your French kickshaws now. Good well-cooked English food."

"My friend—" Hercule Poirot waved his hand— "I ask no better! I put myself in your hands unreservedly."

"Ah—hrump—er—hm," replied Mr. Bonnington and gave careful attention to the menu.

These weighty matters, and the question of wine, settled, Mr. Bonnington leaned back with a sigh and unfolded his napkin as Molly sped away.

"Good girl, that," he said approvingly. "Was quite a beauty once—artists used to paint her. She knows about food, too—and that's a great deal more important. Women are very unsound on food as a rule. There's many a woman, if she goes

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out with a fellow she fancies, won't even notice what she eats. She'll just order the first thing she sees."

"C'est terrible."

"Men aren't like that, thank God!" said Mr. Bonnington complacently.

"Never?" There was a twinkle in Hercule Poirot's eye.

"Well, perhaps when they're very young," conceded Mr. Bonnington. "Young puppies! Young fellows nowadays are all the same—no guts—no stamina. I've no use for the young—and they," he added with strict impartiality, "have no use for me. Perhaps they're right! But to hear some of these young fellows talk you'd think no man had a right to be *alive* after sixty! From the way they go on, you'd wonder more of them didn't help their elderly relations out of the world."

"It is possible," said Hercule Poirot, "that they do."

"Nice mind you've got, Poirot, I must say. All this police work saps your ideals."

Hercule Poirot smiled.

"Tout de même," he said, "it would be interesting to make a table of accidental deaths over the age of sixty. I assure you it would raise some curious speculations in your mind."

"The trouble with you is that you've started going to look for crime instead of waiting for crime to come to you."

"I apologise," said Poirot. "I talk what you call 'the shop.' Tell me, my friend, of your own affairs. How does the world go with you?"

"Mess!" said Mr. Bonnington. "That's what's the matter with the world nowadays. Too much mess. And too much fine language. The fine language helps to conceal the mess. Like a highly flavoured sauce concealing the fact that the fish underneath it is none of the best! Give me an honest fillet of sole and no messy sauce over it."

It was given him at that moment by Molly and he grunted approval. "You know just what I like, my girl," he said.

"Well, you come here pretty regular, don't you, sir? I ought to know what you like."

Hercule Poirot said, "Do people then always like the same things? Do not they like a change sometimes?"

"Not gentlemen, sir. Ladies like variety—gentlemen always like the same thing."

"What did I tell you?" grunted Bonnington. "Women are fundamentally unsound where food is concerned."

He looked round the restaurant.

"The world's a funny place. See that odd-looking old fellow with a beard in the corner? Molly'll tell you he's always here

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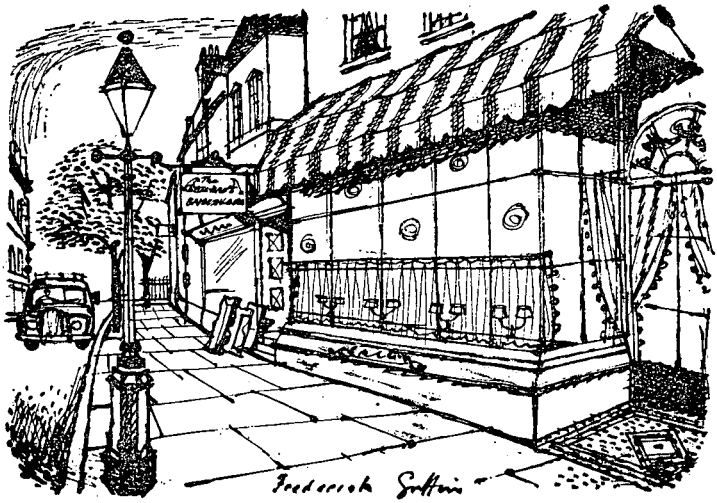

Tuesday and Thursday nights. He has come here for close on ten years now—he's a kind of landmark in the place. Yet nobody here knows his name or where he lives or what his business is. It's odd when you come to think of it."

When the waitress brought the portions of turkey he said, "I see you've still got Old Father Time over there."

"That's right, sir. Tuesdays and Thursdays, his days are. Not but what he came in here on a *Monday* last week. It quite upset me! I felt I'd got my dates wrong and that it must be Tuesday without my knowing it. But he came in the next night as well—so the Monday was just a kind of extra, so to speak."

"An interesting deviation from habit," murmured Poirot. "I wonder what the reason was?"

"Well, sir, if you ask me, I think he'd had some kind of upset or worry."

"Why did you think that? His manner?"

"No, sir, not his manner exactly. He was very quiet as he always is. Never says much except, 'Good evening,' when he comes and goes. No, it was his *order*."

"His order?"

"I daresay you gentlemen will laugh at me—" Molly flushed up—"but when a gentleman has been here for ten years, you get to know his likes and dislikes. He never could bear suet pudding or blackberries and I've never known him take thick soup—but on that Monday night he ordered thick tomato soup, beefsteak-and-kidney pudding, and blackberry tart!

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"Seemed as though he just didn't notice *what* he ordered."

"Do you know," said Hercule Poirot, "I find that extraordinarily interesting."

Molly looked gratified and departed.

"Well, Poirot," said Henry Bonnington with a chuckle, "let's have a few deductions from you. All in your best manner."

"I would prefer to hear yours first."

"Want me to be Watson, eh? Well, old fellow went to a doctor and the doctor changed his diet."

"To thick tomato soup, steak-and-kidney pudding, and blackberry tart? I cannot imagine any doctor doing that."

"Don't you believe it, old boy. Doctors will put you on to anything."

"That is the only solution that occurs to you?"

Henry Bonnington said, "Well, seriously, I suppose there's only one explanation possible. Our unknown friend was in the grip of some powerful mental emotion. He was so perturbed by it that he literally did not notice what he was ordering or eating." He paused a minute and then said, "You'll be telling me next that you know just *what* was on his mind. You'll say perhaps that he was making up his mind to commit a murder."

He laughed at his own suggestion.

Hercule Poirot did not laugh.

He has admitted that at that moment he was seriously worried. He claims that he ought then to have had some inkling of what was likely to occur.

His friends assure him that such an idea is quite fantastic.

It was some three weeks later that Hercule Poirot and Bonnington met again—this time their meeting was in the tube.

They nodded to each other, swaying about, hanging on to adjacent straps. Then at Piccadilly Circus there was a general exodus and they found seats right at the forward end of the car—a peaceful spot since nobody passed in or out that way.

"That's better," said Mr. Bonnington. "Selfish lot, the human race, they won't pass up the car however much you ask 'em to."

Hercule Poirot shrugged his shoulders. "What will you?" he said. "Life is too uncertain."

"That's it. Here today, gone tomorrow," said Mr. Bonnington with a kind of gloomy relish. "And talking of that, d'you remember that old boy we noticed at the Gallant Endeavour? I shouldn't wonder if *he'd* hopped it to a better world. He's not been there for a whole week. Molly's quite upset about it."

Hercule Poirot sat up. His green eyes flashed.

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"Indeed?" he said. "Indeed?"

Bonnington said, "D'you remember I suggested he'd been to a doctor and been put on a diet? Diet's nonsense, of course—but I shouldn't wonder if he had consulted a doctor about his health and what the doctor said gave him a jolt. That would account for him ordering things off the menu without noticing what he was doing.

"Quite likely the jolt he got hurried him out of the world sooner than he would have gone otherwise. Doctors ought to be careful what they tell a chap."

"They usually are," said Hercule Poirot.

"This is my station," said Mr. Bonnington. "Bye-bye. Don't suppose we shall ever know now who the old boy was—not even his name. Funny world!"

He hurried out of the carriage.

Hercule Poirot, sitting frowning, looked as though he did not think it was such a funny world.

He went home and gave certain instructions to his faithful valet, George . . .

Hercule Poirot ran his finger down a list of names. It was a record of deaths within a certain area.

Poirot's finger stopped.

"Henry Gascoigne. 69. I might try him first."

Later in the day, Hercule Poirot was sitting in Dr. MacAndrew's surgery just off the King's Road. MacAndrew was a tall red-haired Scotsman with an intelligent face.

"Gascoigne?" he said. "Yes, that's right. Eccentric old bird. Lived alone in one of those derelict old houses that are being cleared away in order to build a block of modern flats. I hadn't attended him before, but I'd seen him about and I knew who he was.

"It was the dairy people got the wind up first. The milk bottles began to pile up outside. In the end the people next door sent word to the police and they broke the door in and found him. He'd pitched down the stairs and broken his neck. Had on an old dressing-gown with a ragged cord—might easily have tripped himself up with it."

"I see," said Hercule Poirot. "It was quite simple—an accident."

"That's right."

"Had he any relations?"

"There's a nephew. Used to come along and see his uncle about once a month. Lorrimer, his name is, George Lorrimer. He's a medico himself. Lives at Wimbledon."

"Was he upset at the old man's death?"

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" I don't know that I'd say he was upset. I mean, he had an affection for the old man, but he didn't really know him very well."

" How long had Mr. Gascoigne been dead when you saw him? "

"Ah! " said Dr. MacAndrew. " This is where we get official. Not less than forty-eight hours and not more than seventy-two hours.

" He was found on the morning of the sixth. Actually, we got closer than that. He'd got a letter in the pocket of his dressing-gown—written on the third—posted in Wimbledon that afternoon—would have been delivered somewhere around nine-twenty p.m. That puts the time of death at after nine-twenty on the evening of the third. That agrees with the contents of the stomach and the processes of digestion. He had had a meal about two hours before death.

" I examined him on the morning of the sixth and his condition was quite consistent with death having occurred about sixty hours previously—round about ten p.m. on the third."

" It all seems very consistent. Tell me, when was he last seen alive? "

" He was seen in the King's Road about seven o'clock that same evening, Thursday the third, and he dined at the Gallant Endeavour restaurant at seven-thirty. It seems he always dined there on Thursdays. He was by way of being an artist, you know. An extremely bad one."

" He had no other relations? Only this nephew? "

" There was a twin brother. The whole story is rather curious. They hadn't seen each other for years. It seems the other brother, Anthony Gascoigne, married a very rich woman and gave up art —and the brothers quarrelled over it. Hadn't seen each other since, I believe. But oddly enough, *they died on the same day.* The elder twin passed away at three o'clock on the afternoon of the third. Once before I've known a case of twins dying on the same day—in different parts of the world! Probably just a coincidence—but there it is."

" Is the other brother's wife alive? "

" No, she died some years ago."

" Where did Anthony Gascoigne live? "

" He had a house on Kingston Hill. He was, I believe, from what Dr. Lorrimer tells me, very much of a recluse."

Hercule Poirot nodded thoughtfully.

The Scotsman looked at him keenly.

" What exactly have you got in your mind, Monsieur Poirot? " he asked bluntly. " I've answered your questions—as was my

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duty seeing the credentials you brought. But I'm in the dark as to what it's all about."

Poirot said slowly, "A simple case of accidental death, that's what you said. What I have in mind is equally simple—a simple push."

Dr. MacAndrew looked startled. "In other words, murder! Have you any grounds for that belief?"

"No," said Poirot. "It is a mere supposition."

"There must be something," persisted the other.

Poirot did not speak.

MacAndrew said, "If it's the nephew, Lorrimer, you suspect, I don't mind telling you here and now that you are barking up the wrong tree. Lorrimer was playing bridge in Wimbledon from eight-thirty till midnight. That came out at the inquest."

Poirot murmured, "And presumably it was verified. The police are careful."

The doctor said, "Perhaps you know something against him?"

"I didn't know that there was such a person until you mentioned him."

"Then you suspect somebody else?"

"No, no. It is not that at all. It's a case of the routine habits of the human animal. That is very important. And the dead Monsieur Gascoigne does not fit in. It is all wrong, you see."

"I really don't understand."

Hercule Poirot murmured, "The trouble is, there is too much sauce over the bad fish."

"My dear sir?"

Hercule Poirot smiled.

"You will be having me locked up as a lunatic soon, Monsieur le docteur. But I am not really a mental case—just a man who has a liking for order and method and who is worried when he comes across a fact that does not fit in. I must ask you to forgive me for having given you so much trouble."

He rose and the doctor rose also.

"You know," said MacAndrew, "honestly I can't see anything the least suspicious about the death of Henry Gascoigne. I say he fell; you say somebody pushed him. It's all—well—in the air."

Hercule Poirot sighed.

"Yes," he said. "It is workmanlike. Somebody has made the good job of it!"

"You still think—?"

The little man spread out his hands. "I'm an obstinate man—a man with a little idea—and nothing to support it! By the way, did Henry Gascoigne have false teeth?"

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"No, his own teeth were in excellent preservation. Very creditable indeed at his age."

"He looked after them well—they were white and well brushed?"

"Yes, I noticed them particularly. Teeth tend to grow a little yellow as one grows older, but they were in good condition."

"Not discoloured in any way?"

"No. I don't think he was a smoker, if that is what you mean."

"I did not mean that precisely—it was just a long shot which probably will not come off! Good-bye, Dr. MacAndrew, and thank you for your kindness."

He shook the doctor's hand and departed.

"And now," he said, "for the long shot."

At the Gallant Endeavour he sat down at the same table which he had shared with Bonnington. The girl who served him was not Molly. Molly, the girl told him, was away on a holiday.

It was only just seven and Hercule Poirot found no difficulty in entering into conversation with the girl on the subject of old Mr. Gascoigne.

"Yes," she said. "He'd been here for years and years. But none of us girls ever knew his name. We saw about the inquest in the paper, and there was a picture of him. 'There,' I said to Molly. 'If that isn't our Old Father Time,' as we used to call him."

"He dined here on the evening of his death, did he not?"

"That's right. Thursday, the third. He was always here on a Thursday. Tuesdays and Thursdays—punctual as a clock."

"You don't remember, I suppose, what he had for dinner?"

"Now let me see, it was mulligatawny soup, that's right, and beefsteak pudding or was it the mutton? No; pudding, that's right; and blackberry-and-apple pie, and cheese. And then to think of him going home and falling down those stairs that very same evening.

"A frayed dressing-gown cord they said it was as caused it. Of course, his clothes were always something awful—old-fashioned and put on anyhow, and all tattered, and yet he had a kind of air, all the same, as though he was *somebody*! Oh, we get all sorts of interesting customers here."

She moved off.

Hercule Poirot ate his filleted sole. His eyes showed a green light.

"It is odd," he said to himself, "how the cleverest people slip up over details. Bonnington will be interested."

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But the time had not yet come for leisurely discussion with Bonnington.

Armed with introductions from a certain influential quarter, Hercule Poirot found no difficulty at all in dealing with the Coroner for the district.

"A curious figure, the deceased man Gascoigne," he observed. "A lonely eccentric old fellow. But his decease seems to arouse an unusual amount of attention?"

He looked with some curiosity at his visitor as he spoke.

Hercule Poirot chose his words carefully. "There are circumstances connected with it, monsieur, which make investigation desirable."

"Well, how can I help you?"

"It is, I believe, within your province to order documents produced in your report to be destroyed, or to be impounded—as you think fit. A certain letter was found in the pocket of Henry Gascoigne's dressing-gown, was it not?"

"That is so."

"A letter from his nephew, Dr. George Lorrimer?"

"Quite correct. The letter was produced at the inquest as helping to fix the time of death."

"Which was corroborated by the medical evidence?"

"Exactly."

"Is that letter still available?"

Hercule Poirot waited rather anxiously for the reply. When he heard that the letter was still available for examination he drew a sigh of relief.

When it was finally produced he studied it with some care. It was written in a slightly cramped handwriting with a stylographic pen. It ran as follows.

Dear Uncle Henry,

I am sorry to tell you that I have had no success as regards Uncle Anthony. He showed no enthusiasm for a visit from you and would give me no reply to your request that he would let bygones be bygones. He is, of course, extremely ill, and his mind is inclined to wander. I should fancy that the end is very near. He seemed hardly to remember who you were.

I am sorry to have failed you, but I can assure you that I did my best.

Your affectionate nephew,
George Lorrimer

The letter itself was dated 3rd November. Poirot glanced at the envelope's postmark—4 30 P.M. 3 NOV 38.

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He murmured, "It is beautifully in order, is it not?"

Kingston Hill was his next objective. After a little trouble, with the exercise of good-humoured pertinacity, he obtained an interview with Amelia Hill, cook-housekeeper to the late Anthony Gascoigne.

Mrs. Hill was inclined to be stiff and suspicious at first, but the charming geniality of this strange-looking foreigner would have had its effect on a stone. Mrs. Amelia Hill began to unbend.

She found herself, as had so many other women before her, pouring out her troubles to a really sympathetic listener.

For fourteen years she had had charge of Mr. Gascoigne's household—not an easy job. No, indeed! Many a woman would have quailed under the burdens *she* had had to bear! Eccentric the poor gentleman was and no denying it. Remarkably close with his money—a kind of mania with him it was—and he as rich a gentleman as might be! But Mrs. Hill had served him faithfully and put up with his ways, and naturally she'd expected at any rate a *remembrance*. But no—nothing at all! Just an old will that left all his money to his wife and if she predeceased him then everything to his brother, Henry. A will made years ago. It didn't seem fair!

Gradually Hercule Poirot detached her from her main theme of unsatisfied cupidity. It was indeed a heartless injustice! Mrs. Hill could not be blamed for feeling hurt and surprised. It was well known that Mr. Gascoigne was tight-fisted about money. It had even been said that the dead man had refused his only brother assistance. Mrs. Hill probably knew all about that.

"Was it that that Dr. Lorrimer came to see him about?" asked Mrs. Hill. "I knew it was something about his brother, but I thought it was just that his brother wanted to be reconciled. They'd quarrelled years ago."

"I understand," said Poirot, "that Mr. Gascoigne refused absolutely?"

"That's right enough," said Mrs. Hill with a nod. "'Henry?' he says, rather weak like. 'What's this about Henry? Haven't seen him for years and don't want to. Quarrelsome fellow, Henry.' Just that."

The conversation then reverted to Mrs. Hill's own special grievances, and the unfeeling attitude of the late Mr. Gascoigne's solicitor.

With some difficulty Hercule Poirot took his leave without breaking off the conversation too abruptly.

And so, just after the dinner hour, he came to Elmcrest, Dorton Road, Wimbledon, the residence of Dr. George Lorrimer.

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The doctor was in. Hercule Poirot was shown into the surgery and there presently Dr. George Lorrimer came to him, obviously just risen from the dinner-table.

"I'm not a patient, Doctor," said Hercule Poirot. "And my coming here is, perhaps, somewhat of an impertinence—but I'm an old man and I believe in plain and direct dealing. I myself do not care for lawyers and their long-winded roundabout methods."

He had certainly aroused Lorrimer's interest. The doctor was a clean-shaven man of middle height. His hair was brown but his eyelashes were almost white, which gave his eyes a pale, boiled appearance. His manner was brisk and not without humour.

"Lawyers?" he said, raising his eyebrows. "Hate the fellows! You rouse my curiosity, my dear sir. Pray sit down."

Poirot did so and then produced one of his professional cards which he handed to the doctor.

George Lorrimer's white eyelashes blinked.

Poirot leaned forward confidentially. "A good many of my clients are women," he said.

"Naturally," said Dr. George Lorrimer, with a slight twinkle.

"As you say, naturally," agreed Poirot. "Women distrust the official police. They prefer private investigations. They do not want to have their troubles made public. An elderly woman came to consult me a few days ago. She was unhappy about a husband she'd quarrelled with many years before. This husband of hers was your uncle, the late Mr. Gascoigne."

George Lorrimer's face went purple.

"My uncle? Nonsense! His wife died many years ago."

"Not your uncle, Mr. *Anthony* Gascoigne. Your uncle, Mr. *Henry* Gascoigne."

"Uncle Henry? But *he* wasn't married?"

"Oh yes, he was," said Hercule Poirot, lying unblushingly. "Not a doubt about it. The lady even brought along her marriage certificate."

"It's a lie!" cried George Lorrimer. His face was now as purple as a plum. "I don't believe it. You're an impudent liar."

"It is too bad, is it not?" said Poirot. "You have committed murder for nothing."

"Murder?" Lorrimer's voice quavered. His pale eyes bulged with terror.

"By the way," said Poirot, "I see you have been eating blackberry tart again. An unwise habit. Blackberries are said to be full of vitamins, but they may be deadly in other ways.

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On this occasion I rather fancy they have helped to put a rope round a man's neck—your neck, Dr. Lorrimer."

"You see, mon ami, where you went wrong was over your fundamental assumption." Hercule Poirot, beaming placidly across the table at his friend, waved an expository hand. "A man under severe mental stress doesn't choose that time to do something that he's never done before. His reflexes just follow the track of least resistance. A man who is upset about something might conceivably come down to dinner dressed in his pyjamas, but they will be his own pyjamas, not somebody else's.

"A man who dislikes thick soup, suet pudding, and blackberries suddenly orders all three one evening. *You* say, because he is thinking of something else. But *I* say that a man who has got something on his mind will order automatically the dish he has ordered most often before.

"Eh bien, then, what other explanation could there be? I simply could not think of a reasonable explanation. And I was worried! The incident was all wrong. It did not fit! I have an orderly mind and I like things to fit. Mr. Gascoigne's dinner order worried me.

"Then you told me that the man had disappeared. He had missed a Tuesday and a Thursday the first time for years. I liked that even less. A queer hypothesis sprang up in my mind. If I were right about it the man was dead. I made inquiries. The man *was* dead. And he was very neatly and tidily dead. In other words the bad fish was covered up with the sauce!

"He had been seen in the King's Road at seven o'clock. He had had dinner here at seven-thirty—two hours before he died. It all fitted in—the evidence of the stomach contents, the evidence of the letter. Much too much sauce! You couldn't see the fish at all!

"Devoted nephew wrote the letter, devoted nephew had beautiful alibi for time of death. Death very simple—a fall down the stairs. Simple accident? Simple murder? Everyone says the former.

"Devoted nephew only surviving relative. Devoted nephew will inherit—but is there anything *to* inherit? Uncle notoriously poor.

"But there is a twin brother. And brother in his time had married a rich wife. And brother lives in a big rich house on Kingston Hill, so it would seem that rich wife must have left him all her money. You see the sequence—rich wife leaves money to Anthony, Anthony leaves money to Henry, Henry's money goes to George—a complete chain."

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"All very pretty in theory," said Mr. Bonnington. "But what did you do?"

"Once you *know*—you can usually get hold of what you want. Henry had died two hours after a meal—that is all the inquest really bothered about. But supposing that meal was not dinner, but *lunch*.

"Put yourself in George's place. George wants money—badly. Anthony Gascoigne is dying, but his death is no good to George. His money goes to Henry, and Henry Gascoigne may live for years. So Henry must die too, and the sooner the better, but his death must take place *after* Anthony's, and at the same time George must have an alibi. Henry's habit of dining regularly at a restaurant on two evenings of the week suggests an alibi to George. Being a cautious fellow, he tries his plan out first. He impersonates his uncle one Monday evening at the restaurant in question. It goes without a hitch. Everyone there accepts him as his uncle. He is satisfied. He has only to wait till Uncle Anthony shows definite signs of pegging out. The time comes. He writes a letter to his uncle on the afternoon of the second of November but dates it the third.

"He comes up to town on the afternoon of the third, calls on his uncle, and carries his scheme into action. A sharp shove and down the stairs goes Uncle Henry. George hunts about for the letter he has written, and pushes it in the pocket of his uncle's dressing-gown. At seven-thirty he is at the Gallant Endeavour, beard, bushy eyebrows, all complete.

"Undoubtedly Mr. Henry Gascoigne is alive at seven-thirty. Then a rapid metamorphosis in a lavatory and back full speed in his car to Wimbledon and an evening of bridge. The perfect alibi."

Bonnington looked at him. "But the postmark on the letter?"

"Oh, that was very simple. The postmark was smudgy. Why? It had been altered with lamp-black from 2 NOV to 3 NOV. You would not notice it unless you were looking for it. And finally there were the blackbirds."

"Blackbirds?"

"Four and twenty blackbirds baked in a pie? Or blackberries if you prefer to be literal! George, you comprehend, was after all not quite a good enough actor. Do you remember the fellow who blacked himself all over to play Othello? That is the kind of actor you have got to be in crime. George looked like his uncle and walked like his uncle and spoke like his uncle and had his uncle's beard and eyebrows, but he forgot to eat like his uncle. He ordered the dishes that he himself liked.

"Blackberries discolour the teeth—the corpse's teeth were not

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discoloured, and yet Henry Gascoigne ate blackberries at the Gallant Endeavour that night. But there were no blackberries in the stomach. I asked this morning. And George had been fool enough to keep the beard and the rest of the make-up. Oh, plenty of evidence once you look for it.

'I called on George and rattled him. That finished it! He had been eating blackberries again, by the way. A greedy fellow—cared a lot about his food. Eh bien, greed will hang him all right unless I am very much mistaken."

A waitress brought them two portions of blackberry-and-apple tart.

"Take it away," said Mr. Bonnington. "One can't be too careful. Bring me a small helping of sago pudding."

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"Everyone is not looking at me! The waiter, for one, is not looking at me!"

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THE FAN

" What you thinking about, Daise? "
he said quietly

BY CONNELL BERNARD

IT WAS a cold, wet, ugh! there's a pig of a Saturday evening, towards five o'clock, with the salt wind slamming at the thin cottage windows and bucketing rain against the panes with as much force as the gnashing sea more than a mile away dashed its waves into the unyielding cliffs. If you listened in the lull between the ranting gusts of wind, ripping the strips of sea-field hedges like draper's calico, the artillery thunder of the hammering waves boomed clearly across the drenched, intervening land.

Inside the cottage, where it was fuggy, warm, and gas-lit, a snouting, bush-nostrilled man with a face chapped red by the slap of weathers, an unthinking, spade-nailed man, as coarse as the farm animals he tended, was sprawled in the baggy-bottomed, un-easy chair by the fire waiting for the football results on the wireless. He had a thick exercise book on his knee, and an indelible pencil wedged ready between the knuckles of his knotted, root-backed hand. A snoozing cat, black, with a white shirtfront and four white spats, purred beside the chair, nodding and making cat pictures in the flames.

" Nice Tiddy," said the man. " Nice Tiddy then."

He ran his forefinger stubbily along the cat's backbone, and the cat arched and sang like the soot-bellied kettle boiling ready for Alf's washing water when he came in.

A woman, the man's wife, thirty, still pretty, slapped more by circumstance than the weather, came out of the back kitchen with an ovencloth in her hands. She had dark chestnut hair in a thick coil, a weak white mouth and chin, and bright, flighty eyes.

" Jib, I'll give Alf that bit o' sausage for his tea, like, if you don't—"

" Shut up, can't you? " Her husband turned round impatiently, growling. " Can't you see the results is comin' on in a minute? How can I listen if—? "

" I only wanted to know," cried the woman, her face cross

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and glistening from the gas stove. "If I'd have give it 'im without askin' you, oh, the fuss, I bet!"

"Oh, give 'im the Sunday joint for all I care," grumbled the man.

"P'raps I will an' all!"

The woman flounced back into the kitchen and flung the door shut. She caught her own angry gaze in the flaking mirror over the sink where the cold tap dribbled on to a mess of tea-leaves and vegetable peelings littered there.

Her temper lifted, replaced by vanity, and she stared at herself this way and that, admiring her figure and fixing into place with slides the stray strands of her richly coloured hair. Her face was so bone-china pale and her hair, in contrast, so vividly alive, it was as though the vitality from her features was being constantly sapped by the luxurious growth.

On an impulse she pulled open her loose-buttoned purple cardigan, standing with hands on hips to look at her body. Beneath the cardigan she wore only a thin lock-knit vest and her oversized breasts swung heavily through the material; when she pulled it tight, each full globe thumbed a hard nipple sharply into prominence.

In eight years of marriage her husband's attentions had steadily declined, so that now, apart from the casual lust of pub-induced desire, groping for her white body in the sweating, airless dark of the bedroom, he largely ignored her. Sometimes he would fumble with and fondle her, hastily, guiltily, as though making up for remembered lack of attention, but there was no enjoyment nor pleasure in his occasional advances and she suffered him coldly and without interest.

The sudden surge of march music parading through the distorting speaker of the old battery-set in the parlour caused the woman to snatch her cardigan together and set about preparing a fried meal of sausage, bacon, and chips.

The voice of the announcer reading the results filled the room where Jib sat attentively, and intruded beyond into the kitchen. Only when the chips began to spit like wireless atmospherics did the unhurried voice fade into background sound as the woman continued to work.

In ten minutes Alf Smart would spring through the backdoor, 'ullo, ducks! 'ave you missed me? Alf Smart, Smart-by-name-and-smart-by-nature, handsome as a thieving gipsy, black slicked-back hair like a brilliantine poster, cheeky, suggestive, and wandering-handed, tickling her under the arms a bit too forward or pinching her bottom when she bent over the gas or the sink; virile, thirty-two years young, strong and flashing-

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eyed, likes 'em married, they know what's what. The woman made a face to herself and shuffled the chips.

At a quarter past five the backdoor whipped open and Alf bounded in, just beating the snapping gust of wind at his heels and a shower of needling raindrops. He shrugged off a wet oilskin coat and sou'wester and stood in his thick roll-necked pullover a moment, sniffing appreciatively.

"Blimey, what a night! Mmm, bangers for tea," he said. "'Ullo, ducks! 'Ave you missed me?"

He grinned, wide and evenly white under the pencil-line of his dark masher's moustache; God's gift to women shouted out, self-believed, from his every feature.

"Oh, don't you go comin' in all merry an' bright," said the woman, flat-voiced. "Gallivantin' all over in your wet things. Sit down till your tea's ready, can't you?"

"Now, Daise," Alf chided, pouting grotesquely, "there's a fine welcome for an 'ard-workin' bloke as . . ."

"An' don't call me Daise," interrupted the woman. "It's Daisy to you, an' daze is what it's a wonder I ain't in, what with him in there, an' you."

She mentioned her one, tired, often repeated joke without hope of his being amused.

"Why, what's up? Has he bin goin' on again?"

The woman nodded dispiritedly, shovelling done chips on to a plate and putting them to keep warm in the oven.

"Go an' get the kettle off the fire in there, an' have a swill while I dish up," she said.

Alf went into the parlour where Jib, not listening now to the individual match reports on the wireless, was busy checking his two football coupons against the neat, hand-written register in the exercise book. He did not look up as Alf lifted the kettle off the fire.

"'Ullo, Jib."

The engrossed man grunted.

"Done any good then?"

"Got the local fixed-odds up," said Jib, "forty-to-one in tanners. Wish I'd had a shillin' on. Two o' me bankers let me down on the big perm, though."

"Ne'mind." Alf was cheerful. "A quid in the hand's better than a kick up the be'ind!"

"I'll touch, one day," said Jib, returning to his checking. "I'll touch, see if I don't."

It was something he always said, to bolster up his future.

"That's right, Jib."

Alf went whistling back into the kitchen where he poured

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water into the bowl and had a wash; Daisy was putting his meal on the table as he dried himself.

"Ol' Jib's narked," he told her, "'cause his draws have let him down." He flung down the towel, laughing, and slipped his hands under her armpits again, far enough for his fingers to press the swelling sides of her big breasts. "Tickle, tickle!" he said.

The full plate the woman was on the point of laying down with care wobbled dangerously; she banged it on to the scrubbed wooden table, scattering the cutlery.

"Look what you made me do," she fumed. "You nearly made me drop it, you damn fool!"

"Oh, sorry, Daise," said Alf, without being sorry at all.

"An' don't call me—"

"Daise," he said. "All right, Daise. Give us the sauce, Daise." Alf rubbed his hands together blithely before picking up his knife and fork. "Ah, lovely grub!"

He winked and elbowed her in the ribs as he began to eat. Daisy made a spitting sound of annoyance and turned away to clean the frying-pan in the sink.

"Anybody'd think him in the parlour was the lodger," she said. "You get a bit too facey at times. There'd be 'ell to pay if he knew. He looks at me a bit oldfashioned as it is, an' he isn't all that soft, I can tell you."

Alf said nothing, getting on with his tea and gulping from the chip-rimmed pint mug at his side.

A kind of bantering, not-quite-war relationship existed between the two of them, with Alf chivvying and provoking, being obvious in his approach, knowing the way things stood between husband and wife and contented that ripe plums must eventually fall; for her part, Daisy played Alf along to suit herself, allowing him certain advances and the occasional accidentally on purpose closeness of bodies. To know that she was sought after kindled and fanned her woman's feelings, although she was always afraid of the suspicions of her husband.

Alf was a lorry-driver for Woollacot and Sons in the village, hauling gravel daily from the cliff pits six miles into the nearest small town. He had come to the village nearly a year ago, asking at the pub for lodgings; the landlord had directed him up the sea road, fifteen minutes' walk, you can't miss it, to Jib's cottage standing close to the bleak farm on which he worked as a cowman.

"Take 'im in for three pound, Daisy," Jib had said. "It'll 'elp no end with the 'ousekeepin' an' that."

He meant really that it would help no end with his own beer and football pool money, but Daisy had liked the strapping, brown-faced man on the step, and had taken him in anyway.

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She remembered how he had first looked at her, and how their present far-enough but not too-far understanding had grown from that first, at-once wanting look.

Alf clattered his knife and fork down and slid the empty plate across the kitchen deal-top. Daisy, realising she had been absently rubbing the wire scrubber round and round in the frying-pan for several minutes, put the pan on the draining-board, but not before Alf noticed; he got up and stood holding-close behind her. She caught the faint, not unattractive odour of lorry-cab and motor-oil that clung to his working clothes; the smell always prickled her nostrils and stimulated her senses.

"What you thinkin' about, Daise?" he said quietly.

His fingers moved up from her apronstrings to the jutting underpart of her breasts; she did not snap her arms down tight to her sides as she usually did, but let his hands hover, enclose, and almost squeeze before twisting away from him.

"Oh . . . nothin'," she said. "You 'ad enough to eat?"

"Eh? Oh yes. I suppose so."

Alf watched her hanging pots and saucepans up on their hooks, stretching her cardigan, melon-breasted and tantalising.

"Is Jib—er—is he goin' down to The Wheatsheaf tonight, Daise?"

"He always does, don't he? It'd take the Bible flood to keep *him* indoors."

Alf lit a fag, drew on it, and went through into the parlour to read the paper, leaving Daisy to finish the washing up.

At seven o'clock Jib closed his books and peered out into the pouring darkness from the front window; it was so black outside that there seemed to be no actual depth to the night, only a dropped, impenetrable blind the thickness, or thinness, of the glass away. Rain waterfalled over the sides of the leaf-choked cottage gutters and streamed past Jib's straining eyes. He jerked the drawn curtain back into place.

"Well, rain or no rain, I got to collect me winnin's off Albert in The Wheatsheaf," he said. He turned to Alf, not calling him by name. "Give us a lend o' your oilskin an' sou'wester, eh? Else I'll get soaked."

"All right. They're in the back, Jib."

While Jib was in the back kitchen, although he had seen them often before, Alf had a look at the books on the table: a form book, every detail of every match for several seasons painstakingly entered, a forecast register of the current season's games, a book of printed permutations, and another, and a notebook of expenditure and winnings kept by Jib to see whether

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his experimenting systems paid. All his farm dinner-hours, more often than not resulting in censure for lateness back to work, his evenings, and spare time he spent in checking past performance, noting averages, making his week's selections, and patterning them into permutations; the books were as methodical as ledgers and exceptionally neat for such a clumsy man.

" He must be the biggest football fan as ever was," said Alf. " Never goes to a game, yet he's got every damn thing down 'ere you can think of, bar the colour of the referee's hair. If he ever comes up, he'll break the blinkin' bank."

" I'd like to burn the lot," Daisy said vindictively. She was darning socks, the cat seated purring on her wide lap. " He's never won nothin' but a quid or two, now an' then, an' that went straight over The Wheatsheaf counter. Years he's bin at it. You'd think he'd married that lot instead o' me."

Jib came out of the kitchen, solid and lumpy in his thickening mid forties, with the oilskin belted tightly across his middle. He wrapped his books in that morning's newspaper and shoved them under his buttoned-across coat.

" Goin' to show me stuff to Billy Richards tonight. He reckons systems is all bunk," he said. " Wait till he sees this lot. An' one o' these days I'll touch with it to prove it. I'll touch, see if I don't. Oh, I 'speck I'll be back the usual," he told his wife.

" Yes, the usual," said Daisy, when the backdoor banged. " When he's slung out, I reckon."

It was the general thing for her husband to go out at nights, leaving her alone with Alf, without caring. In fact he went so far as to encourage Alf to escort her so that he would not have to be bothered with taking her out. Once a week he gave her five shillings for return bus fare and the price of the cinema in the small dreary town, it being his initial suggestion and then the normal routine that Alf should go with her for a bit of company.

Alf took to paying the fares and the picture-money, and they spent the five shillings on a couple of gins in a backstreet jug-and-bottle where the old barwoman, wise-monkeying and shrivelled, see'd nothing, 'eard nothing, an' kep' her gob shut.

They sat on opposite sides of the fire for some time, until Daisy had finished all the socks; then she got up to put some coal on. Alf watched her as she bent over the scuttle, noting how enormously her breasts hung forward in comparison to the thin width of her back; under her skirt, rising at the back, he could see her strong, dark-stockinged legs almost to the buttoned pull of her suspenders. She was leaning over, her muscular calves braced, heaping up small coal at the back of the grate.

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He moved softly, stretching out his hand. "Tickle, tickle!"

"Oh, Alf, pack it up, you cheeky sod!"

Alf lay back contentedly in his chair again.

"Relax, can't you? He'll be out o' the road for hours. Besides," he said, "I notice you don't tell me to pack it up on the back row of a Thursday, nor in the snug at The Duke with a drop o' mother's ruin inside you."

"Well, it's different then."

"How different?" said Alf. He sat suddenly upright. "Blimey, I nearly forgot, talkin' about mother's ruin!"

He got up and went into the back kitchen, returning a moment later with a half bottle of gin, singing de-dah de-dah, and throwing it from hand to hand.

"I got it at dinner-time," he said. "Thought you might like a little tipple when the old man had buzzed off."

"Don't you be so sure," Daisy told him.

"Oh go on, it's Saturday night. Do you good."

Half an hour and two sizeable neat gins later, relations were a lot more harmonious and cosy; one-chair cosy. Soothed by the gin and the warmth of the fire, Daisy lay stretched along the length of Alf's slack body, her skirt high, toasting her knees and thighs openly as she cuddled into his arms.

"There, that's better eh, Daise?"

"Mmm."

"I don't know what ol' Jib wants to go out night after night for. It beats me," said Alf. "It do, honest. With a nice warm fire an' a good-lookin' missis to snuggle up to."

"He don't care about nothin', only his beer an' football coupons. It's always bin the same."

"Fancy bein' a football fan's widow," reflected Alf. "I'd have jacked it in before now if it was me."

Daisy laughed shortly and reached for the gin.

"I've thought o' that too," she admitted, "but it takes money, an' you got to 'ave somewhere to go."

"Don't you never want to get away from it, an' him?"

"I might do, one o' these days." Daisy filled her glass and drank. "Even if it's only to get to a big town for a bit an' see a bit o' life. I got a cousin in London as works in a cinema. I often wonder what it's like, the noise an' the traffic, the shoppin', the theatres an' that. An' the nightclubs you read of."

"Not much to write 'ome about. I used to work down there an' I seen 'em all in me time," said Alf grandly. "Not much, really."

"It's all right for you. You bin there."

"Well, blimey, if a nightclub's all you want . . ."

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Alf eased her off his lap on to the chair and stood up, briskly active and looking round; he switched on the wireless and searched the stations until he came to a programme of dance music.

"There now, there's music!" Taking the china dogs off the low mantelpiece he put them on either side of the wireless. "That's the band, that is! An' this 'ere—" he stood a cracked Staffordshire china Gladstone in front of the speaker—"this 'ere is the bandleader!" Lastly he reached up to the gas-mantle and pulled the chain down until there was only a dim glow.

"What about that?" he said. "A London nightclub at your service, madam. A wellknown band, drinks on the table, an' the lights turned down low, very romantic. I think the band—"

"—will play next some exotic music from Latin America, the ever-popular rumba," butted in the announcer.

"Thanks, mate!" Alf bowed low to Daisy, mimicking and posh. "Ah, Lady Trollops, isn't it? I haven't seen you 'ere before, 'ave I? May I harsk for the pleasure? I'm a dab 'and at the ol' rumba, I am!"

Daisy giggled, and stood up unsteadily with the glow of the fire in her cheeks and a whoosy feeling in the knees.

"You are a card, Alf, honest. I dunno what I'd do if I didn't 'ave a laugh with you now and again. Oops!" She stumbled over the curling edge of the mat. "I feel a bit tiddly!"

Hugging, and pressing their slow-moving bodies close they swayed in the small hearth-space in front of the fire.

"I haven't had a dance for ages," murmured Daisy. "I used to go reg'lar once, 'fore I got married."

She pillowed her head on his shoulder while Alf nuzzled her cheek and made little nipping love-bites on her neck. His hands wandered up and down her back, not at first noticing, then grasping the fact that he could feel no horizontal strap running across her back under the shapeless cardigan.

"'Ullo, 'ullo," he chaffed, wanting an excuse for horseplay. "I know somebody as don't care if 'er figure drops before she's forty. Why haven't you got one on, eh? You know what 'appens to naughty girls as don't keep 'em in a sling? I'll show you . . .!"

"Oh don't, Alf. Stop larkin' about!" giggled Daisy. She wriggled away from the possession of his about-to-grab hands.

In that moment the backdoor slammed like a gunshot.

Reacting quicker than the following flare of light itself, Alf

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leapt to rip the gas-chain down. As the hissing mantle glared, he scooped up empty glasses and bottle off the table straight under his chair, sitting, snatching up a paper and holding it before him in one desperate movement.

Daisy bit her bloodless lip hard and wheeled to face the dresser on the instant her husband hustled into the parlour.

He looked round, blinking; his fox-red bristly snout, wet with rain and beer, wrinkled suspiciously.

" What the dogs an' that doin' on the wi'less? " he grunted.

" I—I just bin dustin' the mantel." Daisy, snapped sober, prayed her voice would not tremble. " You're back early, ain't you? " she inquired casually, pretending to tidy the dresser shelf.

" Billy Richards wasn't there."

" I thought he was always there? "

" Well, he wasn't tonight," mouthed Jib angrily. " He wasn't then, see? "

" All right."

Jib stood there with scowling brows like clouds, his oilskin shiny and seal-black from the still pouring rain, not quite understanding the surface situation in his dull, beery mind.

Alf looked up from the paper, reaching for a fag. " Crikey! Is it comin' down like that? I should get that wet mac off, Jib, 'fore you take cold. It's drippin' all over the floor, look! "

" Yes, an' have an 'ot drink, some cocoa or summat," said Daisy, with more confidence.

" I don't want it, nor nothin'. I'm goin' to bed! "

The uncertain man stumped out of the room. They listened as he heaved and swore out of his Wellingtons and hung up the sopping coat to drain in the scullery, hearing him tread heavily upstairs and over their heads into the front bedroom. The wireless was still playing dance tunes.

" Strike! " uttered Daisy in a frightened tremor, and again, " Strike me! If he'd just took the notion to come in by the front! "

Country habit being what it was saved Daisy and Alf from discovery in one of the many, developing foreplays of their intimacy to be; had Jib brought home Royalty to visit he would have still come in by the back door, and it was to this stolid set of his ways that they owed their reprieve.

After the incident, with her husband more than accountably disturbed, surly, and suspicious, Daisy and Alf had to be very careful. Nothing was said, even when it came to their weekly outing to the pictures, but thought lay heavy on the air as Daisy put on her good coat and pretty headscarf, all the time waiting for the arresting word.

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"There y'are, what did I tell you?" said Alf as they sat on the cold seats of the old boneshaker bus. He was showing-off confident again, and arrogant with escape. "You're imaginin' things, I tell you. Ol' Jib's just his normal, 'appy little sunbeam self."

"You think it's funny, don't you?" Daisy had been listening and nervously wiping clear the steamed-up window to see out. All of a sudden she rounded on Alf, bitterly quiet. "Well, you don't know him like I do, not after two years courtin' an' eight wed. Once he's on to somethin', he'll worry it like a dog with a rat till he finds out what. I get sick every time I think what'd 'appen."

She looked out at the passing, dusk-shrouded hedges puffing by like the black smoke of a night-travelling train. Alf took her hand and squeezed it, tingling-hard through her cotton glove.

"Don't worry, love. We'll play it safe for a bit then, eh?" he whispered, as Daisy sat stiff and unreplying. "Oh—er—two one-an'-four returns, please."

Out shopping the next day, Daisy found out what was at the bottom of Jib's unexpected return home the previous Saturday, and the cause for his being so suspecting.

"'Ullo, Daise," greeted Flossie Benson, the village magpie and muckraker, outside the one and only shop. They stood talking for a while, this leading by gossiping tangent to that, with Daisy doing most of the listening. Flossie Benson was the wife of the demanding farm foreman under whom Jib worked, so she was obliged to be polite.

". . . an' so what with the bailiffs takin' all their furniture, an' the old man bedridden, Heaven knows what they're goin' to do, Christmas not bein' that far away an' all," the woman gabbled on. "'Ullo, Mrs. Platt, how's Gertie? Oh, that's nice. 'Ere, Daise," she said, returning to the conversation again. "I nearly forgot! Did your Jib come 'ome a-Saturday in a bit of a temper?"

"Why?" Daisy was alert and prepared. "What d'you mean?"

"Ooh, I had to laugh!" The mouthy woman paused, and did so again. "My Wilf come 'ome an' said as how he'd heard 'em in the public bar—'cause he always drinks in the private, you know—he'd heard 'em pullin' your Jib's leg something unmerciful over comin' out an' leavin' his missis alone with the 'andsome lodger.

"It was that Billy Richards started it, after Jib'd bin showin'

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him them football books of his. It was only a bit o' fun, but before you know it, Jib'd up with his pint an' barged out furious. Losin' his rag wasn't in it! I hope them havin' a bit o' sport," she finished, cagily inquisitive, " didn't start a row . . . like . . . ? "

" Strike! That's a thought," Daisy retorted, with a scornful laugh of her own. " Me an' that blinkin' Alf Smart? That's rich, that is! "

She left the woman without explanation, save a parting remark. " No, Flossie, I couldn't fancy that one with peas an' roast potatoes. So you'll have to have your little chatter about somebody else, 'cause my Jib'll do for me. Any day! "

It was raining again, and heavily, in a sheeting downpour that had not ceased all morning and past dinner-time; as though whoever was watering the lawns of heaven had turned the overlapping sprinklers on full cock and had forgotten to turn them off. A man-cautious tiger tomcat, born in the barn and living since on fighting and rats, crunched a meatbone that Jib had brought for it in a paper and crouched between his muck-muddy boots.

Jib sat in an empty horse-stall long after his dinner hour, idly figuring out a new system on his sandwich bag, an open printed book of coupon permutations beside him.

The wary cat looked up and growled, once; then it quickly picked up the bone and sloped away heavy-mouthed to the corner darkness among sacks, tumbled boxes, old harness, and lanterns.

" Nice Tiddy then," said Jib after it. " What's up, eh? What's the matter, Tiddy? "

As he spoke, Benson the farm foreman, rough-mannered and ruthlessly efficient, stamped into the barn.

" Oh, that's nice," he said scathingly. " Hour an' 'alf for your dinner, an' doin' the pools in the boss's time when there's twenty foot o' the cliff fence blowed down for all his cows to blunder through. Oh, very nice, that is! "

" I was waitin' for the rain to knock off for a bit," said Jib. " Listen to it drummin' on the roof. I'll get wet through up the top o' that cliff. It's sure to give over just now."

He had a long-standing hatred of the relentless Benson, which fanged, like an ingrowing toenail, deep into his very quick; and Benson never ceased to goad him when he had the opportunity.

" You ain't made o' blinkin' icin' sugar," shouted the bullying foreman. " Nor likely to wash away. Now get up that field an' strug the wire across temp'ry till we can get new posts in."

" I got no oilskins 'ere! " Jib flared up wildly. " I'll catch me death."

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" Get a bicycle cape then, or a couple o' sacks over your 'ead an' shoulders." Benson did not want to listen. " Only get up there, an' quick," he said, with temper mounting, " an' if I catch you sittin' about wastin' time with that rubbishin' football stuff again, I'll douse it with paraffin an' make a bonfire of it! An' then you can come up an' tell the boss how you earn your bloody wages."

He stamped angrily away while Jib stood his ground, seething; suddenly he picked up a pitchfork and hurled it in the wake of the departed foreman like a vicious javelin. It quivered into some bales of peat stacked against the barn wall.

" Bastard," he breathed. " You'll get summat one o' these days, so 'elp me."

When he calmed down he began to sort out some clean fertiliser sacks from the corner where the cat had carried its bone.

" Ne'mind, Tiddy," he said. " No wonder you run off when he come in. You're like me, your life ain't worth a ruck o' taters. Ne'mind, Tiddy," he said again.

Every cat was Tiddy to Jib; he seemed to find some settling influence, secure and satisfying, in cats, and he liked to befriend them.

He draped two sacks across his shoulders and hooded a smaller one over his head; it would be cold and stinging wet on the exposed sea edge of the land-driving rainstorm. The cat was still chewing, footing the bone like a hungry dog, when he left the barn for the cliff-top.

Several days later, when Alf had said he would be working a late shift, Daisy had the opportunity to speak to her husband about what Flossie Benson had told her, to let him know that the men had only been pulling his leg down at The Wheatsheaf. For some time she had been trying to penetrate the gruff reserve that had fallen on him since then. He did not say much about the house, having his meals with the minimum of conversation and always burying himself in the obsessive study of his football books.

While he ate his tea she broached the subject; his grunting replies were noncommittal.

" Well, I just wanted you not to take any notice of what that old claptrap spreads around, or what they say down there," Daisy persisted.

" I knowed they was havin' me on," Jib told her.

" You didn't come in like it."

" I was tired an' wet through," Jib defended himself.

" From the way you come in," said Daisy, " it looked like you was expectin' to catch us—"

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" Catch you what? "

" Oh, you know. You know what I mean. Like we was carryin' on be'ind your back." Daisy flushed and stood awkwardly by the table. " An' I just didn't want you to think as we was—as I'd let him—oh-h! "

Realising that Jib was plainly disinterested in explanation, and that it was little use talking to him, Daisy broke off with an exclamation of annoyance and went quickly into the back kitchen. When she came back to clear the tea things later on, she made one more attempt to sound out Jib's feelings.

" Look, Jib," she said, " it's gettin' on my nerves the way you bin actin' around the 'ouse lately. Now I want to know straight if you think we was—"

" It don't matter to me," Jib broke in roughly. " I don't care about them down at The Sheaf, nor Flossie Benson nor none of 'em, see? Only that bloody Alf'd better mind how he carries his cup, that's all. Now let me be, will you? I can't work this out with me mind all of a upset! "

Whether playing some waiting game of his own, or merely having closed his thoughts to it altogether, the intractable Jib had set up a wall of indifference it was impossible to penetrate.

After Flossie Benson had spoken to her, unwilling to risk further rumour, Daisy flatly refused to have any sort of relations with Alf. While accepting the need for caution, with his natural breezy, free-and-easy, philandering habits balked, Alf began gradually to fray into moodiness and morose temper, would not go to the pictures, but took to driving the lorry out two or three nights a week into the town, returning late and stumbling-drunk through the yard, disturbing the sleep-quiet house . . .

A fortnight went by, with Jib, impervious to the wearing tension, ploughing doggedly through his set days with absolute resignation. On a usual morning when he had made his own early breakfast and gone to the farm, and then Alf had wordlessly collected his dinner-box and flask off the kitchen table and driven off in the lorry, Daisy did her shopping for the weekend and went back to the cottage.

It was Friday. On Fridays and Tuesdays, in the middle of the day when the men were out, she lugged the big tin bath out of the scullery, filled it with pails of water hotted up in the oldfashioned copper and had a bath in front of the fire. She always lit the copper grate before she went out, and put the bath in the parlour ready for when she returned.

Having unpacked her basket, she carried several pails of water to the bath and then drew the front window curtains before undressing. With a spill she lit the gas-mantle; naked in the

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gently complimenting gaslight, the unsupported globes of her breasts pulling low with their own weight and throwing deep cups of shadow, Daisy admired herself in the mirror over the fire, seeing the sifted softness of her floury-white skin, her curving belly, and the generous broadness of her strong hips and buttocks.

The cat stretched and yawned on the hearth as Daisy lay down in the long galvanised trough of a bath; for some reason, just then, she thought of Jib and Alf.

"They don't know what they're missin', eh, Tiddy?" she confided. "One of 'em don't want me, the other do, an' guess what? Neither of 'em is goin' to 'ave me anyway."

She crumbled a cheap bathcube and relaxed contentedly in the hot lavender-scented water, holding up her legs one at a time to soap them and then lathering her body, sensuous and answering under the movement of her own hands. She stayed in the bath until the water began to cool; a big, body-enveloping bathtowel lay draped and warming over a chair by the fire.

She stood up, shining with water that ran back into the bath along the natural channels of her body, her wet breasts and hips highlighted as she reached for the towel.

A match scraped.

It was deliberately loud, spurting into flame behind her; Alf was leaning in the doorway, casually touching the light to a cigarette stub.

"Strike! What you—?" Daisy snatched the towel round herself, fumbling it across her embarrassed nakedness as she turned. "What you doin' there? You shouldn't be in to dinner, catchin' me like this."

"I come 'ome to see you, Daise."

Alf wandered loosely into the parlour; he had been drinking, so that his speech was retarded and slurred. He flicked the just-lit stub into the fireplace, smirking childishly at his accurate aim.

"That's what. Jus' to see you."

"You bin on the beer. Don't you come no closer."

Daisy stepped out of the calf-deep bath to stand, tight-lipped and flustered, on the mat; water trickled unheeded down her legs.

"How long you bin standin' there?" she said.

"Long enough." Alf perched himself on the edge of the table.

"Well, you better go," Daisy told him. "If Jib was to walk in—"

"Oh, Jib, Jib, Jib," interrupted Alf. "All I ever 'ear is Jib, Jib, bloody Jib! He's in the barn, dodgin' Benson an'

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doin' his damn coupon, that's where he is. It's you I come to see an' talk to."

"Then you better be quick." Daisy was nervous at his outburst. "Say what you want an' get off back to the gravel pits 'fore there's some mischief. What you want, anyway?"

When Alf spoke, it was earnest and very deliberate.

"I want you to come away with me, Daise. Tonight, tomorrer, next week, but come away with me, as soon as you can."

"Now I know you've 'ad too much!" Daisy laughed.

"No, don't you laugh, Daise," said Alf. He advanced a little towards her.

"I bin thinkin' about it for a long time. I got a bit put by, a 'undred or so, an' the chance of an 'aulage job with a builder's in London. You told me you wanted to see the sights, Daise. If you come, I'll look after you an' be good to you. I know how you feel inside, really."

"Well, all that's finished with," Daisy said. "If you think I'm goin' to throw everythin' up, just when *you*—"

"Everythin'?" Alf's voice was harsh. "Is this what you call everythin'? This dead-an'-alive 'ole at the back o' nowhere, an' him as don't care twopence for you?"

"Don't start shoutin', Alf, please. I—I'll think about it, I will, if you go now," promised Daisy. "I got to 'ave time to think about it."

"I won't go till you do more'n think about it," said Alf. "I want you, Daise, God knows I do. I always 'ave."

Within a reaching pace of her, his nostrils took in her inviting, bath-scented smell even as Daisy noticed the sharp-sweet odour of the lorry oil on his overalls. For a second it made her pause, receptive and anticipating, long enough for him to put his arm out, wanting to hold her.

"Come 'ere, Daise," he said softly. "You know how I want you. Don't let's wait. If we could go away . . ."

"I ain't goin' nowhere!" Daisy stemmed the words, defiant and teasing Alf as he sought to fondle her. "Don't you touch me neither. You want the same as him when you're boozed."

Evading his hand, she slipped past the table and ran for the stairs. "So you've 'ad it," she taunted. "An' what's more I wouldn't go with you, not for a pension, see?"

Alf leapt swearing after her as Daisy shouted and scrambled up the dark stairs, towel flying, for the safety of the front bedroom. As she reached the door, Alf grabbed the trailing hem of the towel and ripped it away from her so that she half jumped, half fell naked into the room, throwing her weight against the slamming door to thrust the bolt home; but before she could do

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so Alf's powerful shoulder rammed into the door and he cannoned into the room.

Daisy faced him breathlessly, her breasts heaving, backed against the brass-knobbed double bed; the wires of blood running just under the skin of her wrists pulled and jangled like telephone bells. Her chestnut coil of hair had fallen undone so that the long growth godiva'd to her waist. Through its thin protection Alf saw her warm, pink breasts with the open roses of her nipples spreading widely over the flesh.

Hesitating momentarily before her bare body, Alf allowed Daisy to gain control of the situation. She sat down on the bed, softly dominating. "Well then, Mr. blusterin' Big-an'-Bold?"

"I—er, Daise—I," stammered Alf. "P'raps I shouldn't 'ave . . ."

"Shut up, will you?"

". . . come in 'ere an' . . ."

"I said shut up," she murmured.

After the avarice of the first mouthing kiss they attacked each other in love throughout most of the fierce, long-wanting, now furious, now tender afternoon. When the opening angry concentration of their held-in desires was past, they lay in the lull of love, laughing and smoking, relaxed in their fuller, realised intimacy until, eagerly jealous of the pleasure of initiative, they quarrelled again into possessive love-play and further embrace.

When, eventually, they dressed and went downstairs into the strangely fresh ordinariness of the cottage parlour, Daisy was not long in assuming the familiar drudge of responsibility.

"Oh dear, I got the bath to empty," she said, "an' any amount o' tidying' up to do for when Ji—Jib comes in." She stumbled over her husband's name as she mentioned it for the first time after giving herself to Alf. "You—you best nip off now, Alf, an' come back the usual, after tea. Will you get in trouble?"

"No, I swopped shifts with the other driver," said Alf. He blew her a kiss. "Think about what I said. See you later, love."

"All right then."

Daisy listened to him start up the powerful lorry in the yard, warm the engine for a minute, and then drive away towards the village. She turned to the tin bath; the water was stone cold. There was the parlour to dust, the back kitchen to clear up, and Jib's tea to get. And there was the bed to straighten too.

Alf changed shifts twice in the next week so that he might return to the cottage at midday to spend the afternoon with Daisy.

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" I seen the lorry tearin' up the road a couple o' dinner-times just recent," said Flossie Benson slyly to Daisy, one morning at the shop. " Alf didn't used to come 'ome in the middle o' the day, did he? "

" Now just suppose he'd had his shifts altered up at the pits? " said Daisy. " That'd stop you wantin' to make summat dirty out o' nothin', wouldn't it, Flossie? Or would it? "

" Oh, pardon me, I'm sure! "

Flossie Benson huffed away. Daisy was glad she had put her in her place for once; nosy old bitch.

If one of the Bensons pried, the other plagued. Up at the farm Jib was in Wilf Benson's bad books. The foreman seemed to be going through a phase where he took delight in finding fault with Jib's work, telling him off or ridiculing him in front of the other labourers and stockmen. Jib, therefore, had enough to occupy his thoughts in brooding over these injustices, and noticed nothing untoward at the cottage. On Thursday Benson had complained about the way Jib had mended the fence at the cliff-top; it was still dangerous to cattle, he said. On Friday he shouted at Jib for being back late with the herd for the afternoon milking.

" Bin teachin' 'em to play football? " he sneered.

Jib said nothing, not trusting himself to speak; the grin on the nearby farmboy's face jelled and drooped into open-mouthed fright when he saw the malevolence in Jib's glance.

Normally they did not work at the farm on Saturday afternoons, but the gentleman-owner had been away for a week or two and Benson, anxious for favourable comment, detailed two men in the morning to stay on and do various jobs in and around the yard, cleaning and smartening up generally. Jib was his obvious choice for one, and a casual labourer for the other.

About four o'clock, with all his work complete, Jib sat down in the barn to look at a copy of his football coupon entries for that week. Not five minutes later, Benson sought him out, finding him with his bunch of papers laid out on his knee.

" You perishin' work-shy slacker," he raged. " I knew I'd catch you swingin' the lead! "

In a week or so of picking on Jib for any and every reason, his anger reached a storming peak in this latest moment of discovery. " This is the last time. I warned you. I'll swill paraffin on that bloody lot an' put a match to it if it's the last thing I do. Give it 'ere! "

As he started forward the last thread of Jib's restraint parted; with no violence.

" It'll be the last thing you do all right," he snarled. " You

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try it, you bastard, an' I'll swill paraffin on you an' set *you* alight. I'd like to see you roast."

Benson quailed before the quiet, wicked threat that glared out of the stones of Jib's eyes; he back-tracked instantly into his superior position.

"I—I'll 'ave you up to the boss, I will," he managed to falter. "Monday, first thing. You see."

He almost ran from the barn. In the dark webbed shadows among the clutter of farm gear and implements that was its home, the tomcat mewed dismally. Jib smiled, without smiling.

"Nice Tiddy," he called into the corner. "That told him, didn't it, Tiddy? I bin wantin' to put him right for a bit now."

It was well after half past four by the time he had trudged home in the gathering of night, and the sea wind, honing itself all day on the sharp edge of the cliffs, was just beginning to razor through the weather-whipped hedges, but with a keen, singing, fluting sound, like orchestra woodwind gone wild. It was going to be an unpleasant night.

Jib booted stolidly along the wet road, as he had booted weather in, weather out, wearing out the weathers with stubborn disregard of them, for all his working years; at last he turned tiredly into the cottage yard and tramped up the brick path.

The gas was lit, his tea was laid out, and the fire burning cosily in the parlour when he went in; the cat lined its length along the hearth, snoozing, but there was no one at home. Jib did not care where Alf was, for he kept his own hours, but he wondered, then decided that perhaps Daisy had gone down to catch the village shop before it closed. Yes, she was always forgetting something, soft bitch.

Not until he looked at the clock, seeing it was past ten to five, did he notice the folded piece of cheap writing paper propped against the tin teacaddy on the mantelpiece with his name on it; he read the few lines carefully. Daisy had gone, run off, with Alf; she had to get away, and please forgive her, it was for the best, and don't think too bad of her, she couldn't stand . . .

Jib crushed the piece of paper and threw it into the fire.

"An' good shut," he said out loud. "Good shut to 'em!"

Upstairs, the holiday suitcase had gone off the wardrobe, as had most of Daisy's clothes; so had the sideboard photograph of her, her umbrella, her post office account book, her mother's rings, the few savings certificates, and the four pounds-odd Christmas money saved in threepenny bits in the old dresser jug. Alf's room was bare.

Jib suddenly whirled to the mantelpiece clock; the hands stood at five o'clock. He ripped the wireless knob on, finding

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his pencil and marking register just as the warming-up music blazed to a finish. He licked the pencil and waited for the announcer's voice. The clock and the snoozing cat ticked and purred in the quiet parlour.

". . . and here are today's football results, Division One . . ."

Ten minutes later Jib marked his eighth draw right, with no trace of trembling or tenseness; almost as though he had expected it. The wireless was still full on, but he was deaf to the volume of sound as he patiently checked his register again with country calm.

There were only eight, most oddly placed draws in the entire list of matches, and he had them all.

All in one magnificent winning line.

" Strewth! "

In a sudden all-consuming emotional vortex the football coupon, the note, the coronation teacaddy, Benson, The Wheatsheaf bar, his wife's pale-lipped face, and Alf, grinning like a deceitful gipsy, caught him up and cartwheeled him among the tumbling money in a reeling, unreeling fantasy. He gripped the table edge until the pain in his fingertips stabbed him back into the ticking, purring parlour.

He looked down.

The faithful old cat had got up to rub round his legs, friendly and smiling.

" Nice Tiddy," he said. " Nice Tiddy then."

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★ ★ ★

SEASON AT THE SHORE

Sand on the beaches,
Sand at the door,
Sand that screeches
On the new-swept floor;
In the shower, sand for the foot to crunch on;
Sand in the sandwiches spread for luncheon;
Sand adhesive to son and sibling,
From wallet sifting, from pockets dribbling;
Sand by the beaker
Nightly shed
From odious sneaker;
Sand in bed;
Sahara always in my seaside shanty
Like the sand in the voice
Of J. Durante.

PHYLLIS MCGINLEY

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HARVEST MOON

Wheat-in-the-ear, my true love's posy blowing;
Wheat-in-the-ear, we're going off to sea;
Wheat-in-the-ear, I left you fit for sowing;
When I come back, a loaf of bread you'll be.

RUDYARD KIPLING, *Captains Courageous*

She stood breast-high amid the corn,
Clasp'd by the golden light of morn,
Like the sweetheart of the sun,
Who many a glowing kiss had won . . .
Sure, I said, heav'n did not mean,
Where I reap thou shouldst but glean,
Lay thy sheaf adown and come,
Share my harvest and my home.

THOMAS HOOD, *Ruth*

Ripe for Picking

" I like blackberrying, too. I'll fetch a basket."

" Oh no, sir," she said, remembering her place. " I'll fetch one; if you're sure it'll be all right. And a stick with a crook to it. The ripest ones are at the top."

" All right. You sit on this gate in the sun and I'll be back in no time."

" I think I ought to fetch the basket," she persisted.

" No, you do as I tell you. Up you go."

He lifted her and set her on top of the gate. Araminta gave a little gasp of surprise. Of all the queer, familiar, friendly things to do!

He said breathlessly, " Now sit there and don't move, because when I come back I want to talk to you about something very important."

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She stared thoughtfully at his back as he ran across the yard and at last vanished around the corner of a building. Something very queer had happened to her in the second during which he had held her in his arms before setting her lightly on top of the gate . . . But, was it a remembered feeling entirely? Or something new? Sweet Jesus, thought Araminta, not irreverently, but with profound astonishment, what will I think of next? And him so innocent and friendly, lifting me up just as Sir Edward is lifting the sheaves, because of his gay good heart.

NORAH LOFTS,
To See a Fine Lady

Harvest of Dreams

Resume, harvesters. The treasure is full bronze
Which you will garner for the Lady, and the moon
Could tinge it no yellower than does this noon;
But the grey will quench it shortly—the field, men, stones.
Pluck fast, dreamers; prove as you rumble slowly,
Not less than men, not wholly.
Bare the arm, dainty youths, bend the knees
Under bronze burdens. And by an autumn tone
As by a grey, as by a green, you will have known
Your famous Lady's image; for so have these.

JOHN CROWE RANSOM, *Antique Harvesters*

A Charm for Good Harvest

" Dympna, Dympna," he said, " it's lovely of you to come. Isn't the night wonderful? Can't you understand why they used to send out naked girls at the full moon to plough around the tilled lands, a charm for good harvest? There's a feeling that the moon is terribly near, and the skies low, and everything very close and watchful. Not united, but just waiting near one. You and I and the breathing earth and the moon and the stars . . ."

There she was, standing up to her breast in a pond, without anything on but a coronet of syringa, in the company of a young man with nothing on at all, and whom she had only met the day before. It had all happened since noon. Its gigantic absurdity took her breath away. She wanted to laugh, but remembered those on the path . . . With inconsiderate suddenness, the face of the moon shone out peculiarly clear and bright on the night sky.

RICHARD OKE, *Frolic Wind*

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Shafts of Light

He lay back on the sheaves, his body flat and his head in a rough sweet nest of barley-ears. Pulling the bow hard he shot an arrow straight into the moonlight, and then another and another, watching them soar and curve and fall like lightless rockets.

At last he lay and listened. Nothing had happened. There was no sound. He listened for the girl, but she did not come. He gave it up. It was beyond him. And almost arrogantly he freed another arrow into the sky and watched and listened for its fall, shrugging his shoulders a little when nothing happened. In another moment, forgetting the girl and half-forgetting he was an Indian, he lay back in the fragrant barley with a sense of great elation, very happy.

H. E. BATES, *Harvest Moon*

Yellow Acres

All summerlong and summerlong
The strawed wheat grows rick-high
Windwaved over, desiring
This giant's harvest womb.

Uncrowned, ruling his tall machine,
Cornking reaping, gears his million sickles,
Snails across yellow acres, directs
From his crimson throne, this harvest eating
All summerlong agrowing, green shoot
To ripening, eager and sunswelled,
To be consumed by cropping spikes,
Devoured and threshed, divided
In dark night of iron womb
To corngrain and springstraw . . .

O! summerlong for the new sacks
And the bright grain.

JAMES TURNER, *Combine Harvester*

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★ *With two novels, "Strange Evil" and "King's Daughter," already published, Jane Gaskell, at 18, is now at work on a third. "Bait," her first Argosy story, appeared last year; her new tale is also a spellbinder with a latent, terrifying power that lures the reader into a searing, enthralling past.*

THE WOOING OF GRIMHILDE

BY JANE GASKELL

WHEN her father and his rough uproarious warriors were no longer every night in the hall, drinking and yelling and leaping up to wrestle among themselves and pulling the serving wenches down beside them, when they had all got once again into their long curved ships and sailed away for the Raiding Season, the hall seemed not emptier but more full. Full of dogs without their masters and women without their men, the older women sharp and scolding and never pleased, the younger women loitering, listless, disconsolate.

The great dogs were perhaps the most disgusted at being left alone when the Raiding Season came. The rushes on the floor were changed nearly every day because the women had to fill in their time doing something, so that if you buried a bone or a hunk of meat you were too busy to chew just now among the tousled rushes, you could not be certain you would ever meet it again.

Hilde was exempted from work for it was the first year of her blindness and she was allowed to wander out among the grass and the flowers so that she could learn the most important trackways before the Cold Season came.

But the trackways were difficult and she would spend half the day—that much was for her conscience's sake—on them and then pick up her skirts and run to the forest, where she could feel the long lonely grass and the calm uninhabited warmth of the sunlight, and hear the birds and the insects and the water, and be unperceived. Near the houses, she felt always there were many dozens of gazes on her, all staring because she was blind.

She wept a great deal, either in her bed at night or into the warm tender tangled grass of the forest. That was better, for in her bed she must muffle the strong tearing sobs or be heard.

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Her guardians did not like her to go beyond the outskirts of the forest, for it contained dangers and mysteries even for the sighted. But Hilde felt no fears lurking in it; it seemed to her warm and good to smell and calm and kind.

"Have you heard no great rustlings?" they said. "There are immense grey wolves in there; only last week two were killed a mile from here."

"I do not go in as far as that," she said.

"You go in far enough," they replied.

They warned her of the snakes and of the Demon who lived beneath the ground in the forest, the foul hideous malignant Nibelung with all his kin, whom he had made his subjects.

The last warning brought Hilde to her senses, for in her youth she had seen the Nibelung Alberich in the forest, deep in the cold iron wane of the year, among the harsh gnarled black serpent-twistings of the roots of the enormous black trees in the part of the forest where the ground became riven by rocky fissures and where there were abysses with precipices for sides and bottoms hidden by darknesses impenetrable by the eye. Not even the warriors were ever fools enough to go there.

Hilde had wandered there when she was scarcely a child, and he had haunted her nightmares ever since, in spite of the fact that even then he was hardly taller than herself and that she had seen him for only a glimpse.

Such hideousness was vein-chilling enough, but the evil of him, the perpetual utter rapacity of his eye, the cruelty of the smile beneath his long bristling unkempt black beard—the evil was haunting. He was one of the Old Kind, one of the kind which had been of the earth before Nature had seen that they were a mistake, a corruption in the early world, and had made men.

So Hilde went only to the edges of the forest, and she wandered there, and lay on the grass whose greenness she could only smell and touch.

She thought of Hagen, whom she loved.

Hagen was with the other men, somewhere on the sea with the sun blood-red on the red-bronze shields lining the curved ship's sides, or burning and reaving on the good fecund soil of Britain.

He would return in the good season and, if he still wanted her, he would marry her and she would have his child—his children.

At this thought Hilde bowed her head into the grasses and wept. If. If Hagen still wanted her. Would he want her?

He had shouted in fury and grief when the drunken Thorfried's knife had slashed her face, but so had every other man in the hall, and it was her father who had caught her in his arms, and her brother Donner who had later killed Thorfried.

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And then she had been ill, and she had not had private speech with him till the eve of his departure. Then he had said, "Fare well, Hilde, and may the darkness be warm to you."

She remembered each word, but they need not have been so few for she would have remembered them no matter how many he had spoken. He had kissed her, on the cheek. She did not know if that was because other people had then entered the hall. At that time, her blindness new, she had not any skill in knowing, listening and sensing, how many were with her.

She hoped that it had been because other people entered then, and then she remembered that there had been a time when Hagen, proud of their love, had kissed her fully among them all.

Was she repellent to look on now, did her shocked eyes glare, and did the scar disfigure her? She knew that she was no longer as they were and as she had been; the other girls did not like to play with her for long.

"Mother," she asked, "how huge is my scar?"

And for the hundredth time her mother answered, "The scar is white but clean, and it runs only slightly jagged from temple to chin, leaping the nose."

"I am scarred and blind," Hilde said. "My face is no longer mine. I am strange and useless. Will Hagen love me when he returns?"

"You are still fair," her mother said. But the people called her Grimhilde nowadays . . .

Among the trees Hilde sat. The wind blew the water into ripples around her feet and the leaves swung softly grating against her face. Her back was against the harsh bark of a tree.

"Hilde," said a voice. "Grimhilde."

She started up, hurt to her soul at the grim name used to her face. "Grimhilde," said the voice again.

"Is that you, Swanild?" she asked coldly, for Swanild her foster-sister had always been an enemy of hers.

"No," said the voice, and there was a rustling as the speaker came nearer. "Why do you sit here alone, Grimhilde?" asked the voice. "Every day you come and are here, always alone."

"I am no longer one of my kin," said Hilde.

"I too am no longer one of my kin," said the voice, and there was a further rustling as the speaker seated himself beside her.

"Are you one of the lone men of the woods, a hermit?" asked Hilde; for though the voice was harsh there was a sweetness low in the timbre of it, a wild sweetness like the voice of one who was most full of the knowledge of earth and root, grass and water.

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"I have watched your loneliness," said this voice close beside her. "I have watched it for three moons. You are strange and fair, woman."

"I am disfigured and blind," Hilde said bitterly.

"It is long since I have seen a woman such as you. There is a strength in the mouth of you, and your empty eyes shine like silver, and silvery, too, is the pale white-gold of your hair. Your breasts are proud. You are tall, a stately daughter of men, and I desire you."

"Please leave me now," Hilde said, on a sort of gasp.

"Such beauty should not be left wasted."

"Leave me."

"You would not be useless?"

Hilde stood up, stumbling, and ran back through the grass, but the long arm caught her, and the calloused skin was harsh against her flesh.

She cried out and twisted, but the strength of the other was effortless, no slightest strain was expended on it.

"I desire you; for months I have desired you with all my mind and body," said this voice. "You have filled me with unutterable yearning. You are one of them, with all their height and grace, and yet you are rejected of their company. Will you leave me even before I have time to woo you?"

"Tell me your name," she said, shuddering at the touch, which also hardened painfully and avidly.

"Alberich," said the cruel avid sweet voice.

Then she wept in a frenzy of disgust, and the dwarf loosed his loathsome grip and she ran stumbling away among the trees.

She did not tell anyone of this encounter and she did not go to the forest again, but it seemed to have impressed all her being most deeply.

In the long desolate nights she felt that she could see again. She saw the dwarf as she had when a child: the baleful ancient glitter of his eyes, the worm-white skin, the great shoulders, the long black-hair-covered arms, the cruel rapacious smile of the lips within the beard.

He called her; whenever she was still she felt concentrated on her the wild pull of his voice. All the dwarf's desire of her as a woman, something nobler than himself, his lust for her alien grace—to possess and degrade, through using her body, the incomprehensible soul which he, the soulless one, the discard instead of the chosen one of Nature, could not possess intrinsically—called, steadily. She had only to go into the forest and he would be there. It was strong, so strong, almost irresistible. But it was not a temptation. She was full of horror and disgust.

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The long nights and the long days drove past and the colours of the sky hardened and the air grew steadier and at last the men, the warriors, returned, rough and uproarious and burdened with plunder, and the hall rang and everyone was full of joy.

Hagen greeted Hilde, kissing her upon the cheek, and she was now skilled enough to know that no one else had entered.

" Has the darkness been warm to you, Grimhilde? " he asked. " I grieve for you that your scar has not died. You will always carry it."

And she grieved that he had heard the ugly name, by which everyone called her now.

Her brothers and her father embraced her, and Donner, her youngest brother, held her tightly and his arms were trembling. Every day he brought huge bunches of flowers to her and she laid her cheek on them and smelt their softness and felt their perfume.

She did not have private speech with Hagen again, though he spoke affectionately to her in the hall.

" Does Hagen ever follow me with his eyes? " she asked her mother.

" He seems fond of you," her mother said.

Later, when all the air was filled with laughter and only she of the younger people remained indoors, she asked her mother, " With whom does Hagen walk and laugh in the sunlight? "

" How do you know that there is anyone at all with whom he walks? " replied her mother.

" Tell me."

Then her mother said sadly, " He walks with Swanild, and they laugh together, but I am sure it is still you of whom he is fond."

Then another woman said, " He has kissed her on the mouth before us all."

And Hilde's mother cried, weeping, to her daughter, " Do not believe her, Hilde."

And the other woman said, " Do not pretend that I lie, you know that was the truth," and the two women fought.

But Hilde escaped out on to the hillside, and lay there weeping into the twilight, for of the two women it was her mother she disbelieved.

She thought of Hagen's golden head bending to Swanild's and of their laughing together, and of their kiss, and she lay writhing on the hillside and clutched the stark grasses and wept into the twilight.

Then a gentle voice whispered into her ear, " Why are you weeping, fair one? "

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And though it was a whisper she recognised the gentleness, and she said, " I am weeping for you, Hagen, for you no longer love me after plighting your troth to me."

" I should be a false man indeed if I lost my love for you after plighting you my troth," he whispered, and she was drawn into his arms. She felt a fierce ecstatic relief as his arms, harder even than she remembered, held her to him. Their love on the hillside was fierce and amazing.

After that she was happy, and every night she stole away to the hillside and lay in his arms with unspeakable joy.

" When I return from my next raiding trip you shall be my wife," he whispered. " You shall have a house of your own and you shall be rich. Meanwhile we must be secret."

Then he would whisper, " I love you, I love you," and her emotions melted together within his fierce tenderness; she had never been so happy.

Then the wane of the year came, and no one could go out at night, and then the Cold Season, and the winds and the wolves wailed and howled outside and the snow flurried against all the walls. And then it was the Raiding Season once again. The streams broke their ice and babbled again through the new sweet grass, and the birds filled the trees and the men sailed away in their long curved ships. And while they were away Hilde's baby was born secretly.

" His son," said Hilde, half-bemused with the passing of pain, holding it new in her arms and seeming to herself to be holding all the love of which it was the fruit. " What is he like, Mother? Can you already tell from his features who my husband will so soon be? "

And her mother said in a bewildered voice, " He is very small and white and he is covered with long black hair."

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SOLUTIONS to SOVEREIGN SEVEN
on page 52

1. *i. Swat; ii. Afghanistan; iii. Tunis; iv. Baghdad; v. Algiers.*
2. *It runs from Edinburgh Castle to Holyrood Palace.*
3. *a. Meadowsweet; b. Silver Birch.*
4. *i. Mary Renault; ii. Ugo Betti; iii. Edmund Spenser.*
5. *a. Light rose pink; b. Yellow; c. Deep blood red and pale yellow.*
6. *i. Lion; ii. Death; iii. Oak tree; iv. Beau Nash.*
7. *They are printers' standard terms for paper measurement.*

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FISHERMAN'S LUCK

The reel whirred out
with its mad song

BY JOHN HYNAM

TWO OF Mother McGarity's hens flustered in front of Daniel O'Hara as the six-year-old tore down the street. His yell, clear as the Dalconnell bells across the lough on Sundays, sounded over half Ballaculley.

"Hoy! Wait for me!"

His brother Patrick, a truculent nine, taller but with the same blue-black hair, stopped; he was in the company of a boy of his own age, a child whose red hair and freckles had earned him the nickname of Flamer Yeats.

"Patrick! Flamer!"

Patrick and his friend, whose real name was Joseph, turned away and continued to walk on.

"Didn't I tell you?" growled Patrick. "No sense at all. He'll have herself after him in a minute. Take no notice."

"Ah, all little brothers is the same. And a belt round the ear seems to do no good at all—"

Daniel signified his arrival by grabbing his brother's patched jacket and hanging on, swaying as he sought to get his breath back.

"Hoo—hee—Patrick, take me with you!"

Patrick jerked away his jacket petulantly.

"You'll get leathered," he warned. "How many times do you have to be told? You're *too young*!"

Daniel's eye glistened.

"Too young, Dan'l! And we're not daft, like you, wanting to go and try to catch Dutch Mike—"

"Father said he'd give me five shillings if I caught the carp."

They roared with laughter.

"It's a long leg you have for pulling," chuckled Flamer. "We go after the fish that don't mind being caught."

The tear grew in the small boy's eye.

"I'd be good, I'd not bother you." His lip trembled.

"You know what they said," replied his brother magisterially, "you're not *responsible*!"

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Then Patrick and Flamer went up the street, while Daniel, who thought that not being responsible was something terrible like the mumps or scarlet fever, stuffed a fist in his mouth and tried hard not to cry. Then, realising that if he wanted to get away he would have to be quick about it, he scarpered fast by Murphy's yard, down the alley by Murphy's high wall, and out behind the houses into the meadows, leaping amid milkmaids and buttercups and watched by grave-eyed cows . . .

Fishing, fishing, fishing! Was it any wonder that the boy chafed, with his father an expert, and his elder brother allowed to go anywhere within three miles of home? But the gap of years between them was wide, and his father worked at the small-holding in his free time, and his mother washed for the big house and the shooting-lodge.

He stopped running, for he was hot and his legs seemed to buckle under him. At a turn in the path, near where a great hawthorn spread its shade, sat a man clad in rusty black. He was lean and greying, with a long kindly face and thick hair. He was watching a float, and smoking a pipe, and he seemed utterly content. He looked up as Daniel approached.

"Well now," said Michael Grantley, "the younger O'Hara seems in a sweat. Sit down, boy."

Daniel obeyed. For two minutes they did not speak; they watched the float riding on the green, secret water.

Daniel said hesitantly, "I'm supposed to be too young to go fishing, on me own."

"Hm. I saw your brother and young Yeats, just now. Too young, eh? Should have thought that a big feller like you would have been able to look after himself . . . Daniel, does your mother know where you are?"

"Well—you see—I can go fishing when—"

Daniel stopped. The grey eyes were looking at him very straightly.

"She—sort of has an idea, I daresay, Father."

"Ah. So when she finds you, she'll leather you, eh?" Daniel's stomach went tight as the priest continued. "My mother used to be after me too, when I used to go fishing in the big lough, at Dalconnell."

Daniel was amazed; that Father Grantley could once have been a boy like himself, and got into the same sort of troubles, was something he had never imagined. Surely the Father was not just putting it on for Daniel's benefit?

"She was—a bit sharp then?"

The priest chuckled.

"You could say that, bless her."

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Daniel stared at the water.

"D'you think you'll ever catch *him*?"

Father Grantley smiled through the curls of drifting smoke.

"Ah. He's swum three times round my bait, and kicked it once. He'll live for ever, will that carp."

"He's cunning."

"He is that."

"Me father did say he'd give me five bob if I ever caught him."

"He did? I think his money's safe."

"Ah. But still." Daniel came out of his impossible dream of five shillings when he suddenly realised that he didn't know an important thing.

"How did he come to be called Dutch Mike?"

"There used to be a Dutchman named Micky de Ridder used to come here for the fishing, before you were born. Had been a sailor. He went a little crazy trying to get the beast."

"She bobbed!" cried Daniel.

"No. No, it was nothing," said Grantley. He glanced along the path. "But—ah—there's something coming now. Look."

Daniel looked and gasped, and began to rise.

"It's herself!"

"Steady, boy." The priest restrained him. "I'll handle this."

The stern expression of Mrs. Bridget O'Hara softened when she saw the company her son was keeping. An erect, proud-looking woman, she greeted the priest with respect, while gazing at her younger son. Daniel's dark blue eyes were like hers, and the hair was the same too, though the mother's was touched with silver.

"Yes, it is indeed a fine afternoon, Bridget O'Hara," returned the priest. "Now, why not sit down a while, after coming all that way?"

She remained standing.

"I came for Daniel."

"A pity that he should have to go away. We were having some very interesting words. Sharp boy, and well brought up, I'd say."

Daniel saw that her face was less severe.

"You really think so, Father?"

"I do. He's at the age when mothers start to get anxious, you know. But, if a mother has brought her boy up well, what has she to be anxious about? He'll tear his trousers so many times, he'll come home plastered with mud so many times, get into the right number of fights, and so on."

That puzzled her.

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" The right number of fights, Father? "

" Certainly. Such things have to happen to him—they're a vaccination for life. If he misses them, that's the time to start worrying. Now, isn't there a lot of good in a young feller who likes to come and sit by his priest and talk things over in a civilised man-to-man sort of way? ' '

Blarney. Blarney, blarney! Though Daniel did not understand half of what the priest said, he saw the results of it in his mother's manner. From that moment, he loved Michael Grantley as much as he did his parents.

The day after Daniel's seventh birthday was Saturday, and he knew that Father Grantley would be down at the water. It had become an understood thing that Daniel could go with the Father and fish, and not have to ask his parents if he might so absent himself.

As he went off, he thought about his birthday presents. Four cards, and a new Sunday suit, and a fishing-line and a clicking reel for his simple pole. No real rod yet, no shiny, jointed, brass-bound affair.

Such was the strength of Daniel's love for Michael Grantley that he no longer wished so hard that he might go far afield with his brother and Flamer. The priest had taught him much; as well as fisherman's secrets, the boy had begun to respect and understand mankind, though he hardly realised that. But there was this: Daniel O'Hara had instantly cast from his mind the thought that he might pray for a new rod.

He jigged along on his way to the backwater, gawping at the fleecy clouds and the blossoming trees and all the greenery, knowing so much more of sun than of shadow. When he saw the tall figure at the backwater, he almost shouted; then he remembered his fisherman's manners and walked up softly, but with pride, and sat down quietly beside his friend.

After a minute, the priest removed the pipe from his mouth.

" It's a grand afternoon, Daniel."

" It is, sir."

Daniel was wanting to show his line and reel, but association with the man had given him a certain enjoyment in taking things with a little gravity.

" Many happy returns of the day."

" Thanks," said Daniel shyly. He added, " 'Twas yesterday."

" I know it was. But I had to go into Cork yesterday." He blew smoke, and grinned at the boy through it. " Important business. D'you not see why? "

Then Daniel saw.

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"Oh," he cried, "a new rod! She's beautiful. But the old one was good, real good."

"Ah, you see, I was tempted. The vanity of man. I'll be doing a rare sermon on that, shortly. 'Twill freeze the ears on you. Well now . . . it so happens that I have a rod spare, here."

"Your old one?"

"It was my old one. Now it's yours, Daniel."

He could hardly believe it. When Grantley offered it, he hesitated to put his hand to it, as though it was like the king leprechaun's sword liable to disappear at the touch of an unworthy hand. When at last he held it, it was as if an electric current ran all over his body.

"Oh, oh!" he whispered. "It's fine! It's better than Patrick's, it's—oh, it's better than me father's!"

"I wouldn't shout that too loud," said the priest. "Now, what's this you have on your old pole?"

Daniel fitted the new reel, his heart bursting with joy. Now, with the Father's home-made hooks to use, and his own bait, he had everything, everything! Should he live a thousand years, he would never be more fulfilled than at this moment. With his eyes shining, and his words tumbling over one another like peat sods tipped out of a sack, he set about his preparations.

"I must try her," he cried, "I must try her!"

He did not notice the footsteps until Philip McGarity was close to them. The tall lad addressed the priest.

"Father, can you come? It's old Murphy."

The priest settled his rod into a wooden crotch, and rose.

"Has the doctor been sent for again?"

"Ah. But the ambulance will come and take him to the hospital. He asked for you."

"I'll come. Guard my rod, Daniel."

Daniel flashed a grin at his friend, and then became absorbed in his fishing once more. Now the rod was baited and ready. Now was the moment! He heard the line whistle out, saw the swinging parabola, heard the satisfying plop as his float landed and dipped and settled amid a widening nest of rings. The float was red and green and white; the rod, worn at the corking by the firm hands of its beloved previous owner, settled comfortably in the boy's sweaty grip.

"Och!" said Daniel to himself. "I'm a loon. What am I fishing here for? Why did I not go to the main stream, where the dace and roach are easy?"

But he knew that he had cast there because the slightest delay in the use of his new possession would have been quite intolerable. He sat there in a rosy dream of joy. He saw himself soon going

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along with the men of the club, winning great competitions . . .

He did not see the first bob of his float. This is true. He was so far gone into his dream world that he did not see that first dainty movement, so light that a fairy might have breathed upon it in passing. He thought about Father Grantley, and what a good man he was. If there was ever anything that Daniel could do to repay him for his kindness . . .

And he did not see the second bob.

This time, it was no fairy breath that did it; this time, it was the exploratory tug from a fish which might very soon—say, within the next five seconds—take the bait at which it nuzzled.

Then the float disappeared.

The next second there was a snarl from the reel, and Daniel gave a yell and did the first silly thing that came into his head. He gripped the rod with all his might and at the same time braked the reel. Already crouching forward, he was taken right off balance. The tug took him forward and down, head first, and he ploughed messily into the mud at the edge. Mud, stinking and weedy, got into his mouth and eyes; the reel whirred out with its mad song, and Daniel, slipping and sliding, blinded and plastered with mud, scuffed about at the edge of the backwater while what was surely the biggest fish in Ireland did its best to escape from the barb that held firmly in its lower jaw.

The whizz of the reel stopped abruptly, and Daniel, with a sudden rush of terror, hoped that the end of the line was secure. It was. Holding the rod in one hand for a moment, he clawed the mud out of his eyes, and was astonished to find that the fish, having gone the whole length of the line, was now swimming angrily back and forth at the far end of the backwater.

"Begob!" shouted a well-known voice. "He's got one! Come on, Flamer, the kiddo's got one!"

Never before had Daniel been so glad to hear his brother's voice.

Feet pounded up.

"Don't jerk him, for the love of God, don't jerk him!" shouted Patrick.

The two panting boys skidded down the slope to the mud level.

"Let me!"

"Hold on to it, but don't take it off me!" admonished the filthy and excited younger brother. "He's mine, and I'll land him, see if I don't!"

"That's it," said Flamer, "Dan'l must land him."

So they worked at it together.

Daniel could not tell how long it took, for now he was in a new

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kind of dream, a dream of a man's world of action and prowess, a world in which great fish were landed, measured, admired, stuffed, and finally lied about in the smoke of Heber's snug. And at last the struggles of the fish grew less.

"Reel again," said Patrick, "steady now, steady." He turned to Flamer. "Better have the gaff."

Flamer scrambled up the bank to get the stake with the eight-inch nail clapped to it. Daniel reeled, and the fish came in, sluggish but not resisting much. Then he was visible in the shallows, three yards away, black and gold, fat and noble.

A fish fit for a king.

Daniel began to shake.

"It's—it's—" He could not say it.

"Glory be!" howled Flamer. "It's Dutch Mike!"

Suddenly, Daniel saw. He grabbed at the gaff in Flamer's hand and threw it, wild and whirling, away into the middle of the water.

"No," he cried, "no, you'll not gaff him!"

Five shillings, ten shillings, or a pound, Daniel knew what he had to do. He had to get at that exhausted creature as it swam in the shallows, he had to release it *so that Father Grantley still had a chance!* Daniel O'Hara must know his place, must give way to his betters. The priest must have the glory, even though it might take two or three more years—or even if it now remained for ever uncaught, the chance must still be there.

"Well, there's a thing!" snapped Patrick. "Here, I'll get him—ow!"

The last noise was because his younger brother had hacked him scientifically upon his shin. Daniel stood in nine inches of oozy, disturbed water.

"*I'll* get him. And I'll let him go. And if either of you say a word, I'll put the milkmaid's curse on you!"

He bent down and grabbed the fatness of the fish, and felt its muscular twitch. He fumbled at the mouth with anxious fingers, while Flamer stared and Patrick rubbed his leg and scowled angrily. Then Dutch Mike was free; he swam slowly away. Daniel, careless now of the wet and mud, squelched towards the grass. His brother met him there, flushed and angry.

"And who d'you think you are, footin' me like that?"

He gave Daniel no time to answer, but aimed a swipe at the younger boy's head. Daniel ducked under the swinging arm and planted a blow right in his brother's middle. A moment later, to the alarm of Flamer—generally broadminded in the matter of fights both public and private—the O'Hara brothers were rolling in the muck and going at it hammer and tongs.

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" For the love of God! " exclaimed Flamer. " Will yer hold it? What'll herself say? Hey, stop it! "

He grabbed Patrick by the shoulders. The older boy was sitting on the other's chest, while Daniel, looking more like a blackamoor than a respectable junior citizen of the republic, panted and hissed threats through his teeth.

At Flamer's second shake, Patrick came to his senses.

" That's right," he gasped, " we'd better stop. Aw, heck, look at the mud, will you? "

The brothers O'Hara, thoroughly mucky, staggered to their feet. Daniel still wanted his way.

" Promise," he insisted, " *swear* that you'll not tell anyone I caught the fish! "

Flamer and Patrick exchanged glances.

" Go on," said Flamer. " He means it."

" I swear," said Patrick.

" Me too," added Flamer, " but if his reverence asks me—"

" Here he comes," said Patrick, " glory be, he mustn't see me like this! "

The two ran off to where the weeping willows trailed their green. From this cover, they could take a somewhat longer way home.

Daniel grabbed his tackle and was out of sight behind a clump of willowherb when Father Grantley returned. He saw the priest look round, as though wondering where Daniel was, saw him give a puzzled glance at the welter of mud at the water's edge. Then he settled down, lit his pipe, and took his rod from the crotch where it was set.

As he watched the bent back, Daniel O'Hara, dirtier than a sweep and sure of a leathering when he got home, felt a glow of contentment. It was a great thing, in his mind, to have saved the fish for Father Grantley. In his mind's eye he saw the Father bearing Dutch Mike in triumph through the village, saw the fish being weighed, coming back in a glass case from the taxi-whatsit man in Cork. Though his reverence would not personally boast of the achievement in Heber's snug, Daniel knew well how the tale would be told time and again.

Mud was drying on the boy, and the sun was making its way towards the west. The glory of his sacrifice began to dim in his mind, and the thought of how he would be greeted at home began to loom large. Well, there would be no dodging it, none at all. Come to think of it, Patrick would be home first, and that might help, just a bit . . .

He sighed, thought of his father's joking offer of five shillings, and felt very virtuous.

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Father Grantley had a bite.

Daniel saw him leap to his feet, bend suddenly backwards, slip, and land with his heels in the air. The reel buzzed.

"Hold on!" yelled Daniel, and ran to help; he dashed in to retrieve the rod from the shallow water. The priest took the rod, giving an amazed glance at the state of the boy.

"All right. I'll play him!"

It was not much of a struggle. This must be quite a small one; nothing to make a fuss about. Why, compared to what Daniel had been through earlier that afternoon, this thing on the Father's line had about the strength of a minnow.

Father Grantley reeled in, and the fish came into the shallows. Daniel gulped when he saw that it was Dutch Mike, again! The fish had been caught twice in the space of an hour. Oh, the wonder of it—as though it had been planned, as though the Lord Himself understood Daniel's reasoning, and had brought the fish into the hands of the man who most deserved him!

The gaff had drifted ashore. Daniel waded in with it poised.

"Daniel! Stop!"

The boy obeyed.

Father Grantley walked into the water, and stood looking at the great carp.

"After all these years," he said softly, "after all these years, I caught him. What made him do it? What suddenly made him bite?"

There was a holiness about the moment, to Daniel.

"Oh, Father, you can take him now, and carry him through the village and let them all see, and then you have Finnegan weigh him and get him off to Cork for stuffing and all!"

The man's smile was gentle.

"Yes. Here he swims. All I have to do is lift him out of the water, and he's mine."

"It takes a great fisherman to do it, sir, to land a fish like that."

"And he'd be on my wall, for always, Daniel."

"Yes, sir," said the boy, in a hushed voice.

"Well," said the priest, and he bent and took the exhausted fish in his hands. For a moment he fumbled at the jaw, and a flicker of surprise showed in his face. Then, to Daniel's vast dismay, there was Dutch Mike swimming slowly away, free again. With his underlip trembling, he watched the great fish ease out into the green depths, and at last disappear from sight.

For Daniel O'Hara, the world was in ruins; now he could pretend to be a man, full seven years old, no longer. He was lost in the mysteries of things too big for his understanding.

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The mud-plastered little figure ran and knelt on the bank, sobbing as though his heart would break. He felt Grantley's arm round his shoulders.

"Daniel, my beautiful boy, what is it?"

Daniel shook his head; his eyes were tightly closed.

"Daniel. Tell me what you're crying for."

Shake of the head again, very firm.

"Daniel."

"No, I'll not tell you!" He opened his eyes, and he shouted, "I'll not say; d'you hear?"

A great prize had been given up for the love of a friend, and the sacrifice had been rejected. What more cruelties were there to learn of grownups?

"Daniel," said the gentle voice, "if you won't tell me, then I'll tell you."

"Hm?"

"That fish had been caught once before, this afternoon; that's why it gave so little fight."

The boy stared, forgetting to cry.

"Either it got away after a struggle or it was let go. I think it was let go."

Daniel clamped his lips together mutinously, and avoided his questioner's eye.

"Daniel, was it you?"

The boy turned away; he could not hold his lips firm.

"Daniel, you must answer me."

The boy looked at the priest; his small round face was streaked with mud and tears.

"'Twas me."

"Yes. I knew."

The boy could not believe it. "But who told you?"

"No one. When I took my hook from his jaw, there was another one, also blue tied, still in his jaw. Only two people I know use my home-made hooks—Daniel O'Hara and Michael Grantley."

Evening had crept into the sky. Amid the sad trailings of the willows, a thrush sang as though its heart would break.

"So, you saved him for me?"

"Yes, Father."

"And now you're mad at me because I didn't take him?"

The boy nodded.

"Well, now. How shall I explain? You remember that sermon on vanity I told you of? This afternoon will be part of it, I think. What you did, was for me. What I did, was for someone else—I don't know who it might be; but it will remain a

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secret, Daniel, a secret, eh? I couldn't have done my piece if you had not done yours."

He scanned the grimy face anxiously.

"Do you see, Daniel? There are certain ways we want the world to go."

The boy raised his head and looked at the sky, beyond and above where the thrush sang.

"Yes, Father. I think I see."

"Good." The priest collected his tackle. When he was ready, he smiled down at the untidy boy. "You grew up a bit today, Daniel."

"Did I, Father? How?"

"Oh." The other grinned, and shrugged his shoulders, and took the boy's hand. "You'll understand, one day. And now, let's go and see what Mr. and Mrs. O'Hara have to say for themselves."

Suddenly, the impending leathering didn't seem to matter. As they walked away from the water, the rich plop of a rising fish sounded, and the ripples sped out and out and died away again.

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★ ★ ★

FISHING IN THE WEI RIVER
(*A.D.* 811)

In waters still as a burnished mirror's face,
In the depths of Wei, carp and grayling swim.
Idly I come with my bamboo fishing-rod
And hang my hook by the banks of Wei stream.
A gentle wind blows on my fishing-gear
Softly shaking my ten feet of line.
Though my body sits waiting for fish to come,
My heart has wandered to the Land of Nothingness.
Long ago a white-headed man
Also fished at the same river's side;
A hooker of men, not a hooker of fish,
At seventy years, he caught Wên Wang.
But *I*, when I come to cast my hook in the stream,
Have no thought either of fish or men.
Lacking the skill to capture either prey,
I can only bask in the autumn water's light.
When I tire of this, my fishing also stops;
I go to my home and drink my cup of wine.

ARTHUR WALEY
translated from the Chinese

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STORMS OF OUR JOURNEY

Simon Kepple "Husky" Skafe, Canadian multi-millionaire and pioneer of the North, president of Turtle Mountain Uranium, Skafair, Skafe Exploration—his latest project oil from the Arctic—is flying to meet a tractor train at Camp Husky. His daughter Sally has made him take her on her first trip to the frozen North.

THE SKAFES drove through Westmount between snowbanks six feet deep or high, a sordid growth of winter, but the sun was shining on dirty snow.

"It will all be gone by the time we come back," Grace Skafe said, holding hands. "Just to think, Husky, that I shall be on a beach tomorrow afternoon, and you will be in some horrid igloo in your deerskin suit."

"We usually take them off inside," her husband said.

"In your birthday suit then. That sounds worse in some horrid igloo." She was quite skittish for half past seven in the morning, going to Dorval with him to see him off. Gregor, the houseman, had driven Sally out ahead with baggage.

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by DAVID WALKER

" Gregor takes a dim view of Sally going to Turtle Mountain."

" So do I," Grace said. " I think it's absolutely mad. I think it's the craziest thing I ever heard."

" Oh, I don't know," he said. After twenty hours, or however many had elapsed since his daughter had put a double-barrelled pistol to his head, Skafe had grown quite used to the idea. Her brother John seemed to think that she would be all right on a pedestal at Turtle Mountain; and John was sound about some things.

She is full of faults and full of guts, that girl, he thought. The prospect of flying with Sally for her first glimpse of his North was enormously exciting. " What, Grace? "

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It had been some remark about Sally and Sally's mother, Anna.

"Nothing, dear," Grace said. Her hand lay soft and slack in his.

There was little traffic at this hour down to Decarie and on past Ruby Foos and round to strike for the airport. Pickering was a sound driver at moderate speed. If Skafe was in a hurry or if he felt like action, chew up miles, he drove himself. Sally could drive fast, too. In so many things she had his touch.

"It's only a week," he said. "I'll be thinking of you." Now he pressed the hand that was a comfort to him.

They drove round a Skafair hangar, and to the Crusader where Sally was standing with the pilots. "Good morning, Roy," he said. "Good morning, Dicky." Young Dicky Farmer had been two months in hospital with an injured arm, but was as good as new again, or he was better—less bounce in him, more man in him.

"All set, Father," Sally said, in her office personality. He had told her that she could damn well work her passage as stewardess-secretary and baggage mistress. Now she said good-bye to Grace, whom she used and took for granted, of whom she was very fond; but the wall of reserve on Sally's side persisted.

"Au revoir, Grace darling," he said, "until next week."

"Good-bye, darling Husky," she said. "I'll be waiting for you every single minute."

"Bless you," he said, almost saying, "I love you" in farewell. Grace blew him a kiss as they taxied out. The president blew one rather sheepishly back.

They flew all day to the west and north, over a smoke-feathered city in the snow; a black race of river in the snow; a railroad line that cut the wilderness of forest, rock, and lake; a town within the wilderness; and on. Spring had not come, but the hold of winter was not absolute.

Farther north it was absolute. "I see what John means about 'a death of winter,'" Sally said, "but I don't agree. Methinks our Lady sleepeth underneath her counterpane. What a cosy thought," she said, like Anna, her mother. "*For we be also a people, said our Lady of the Snows*, with acknowledgments to Mr. Kipling . . . Shall I brew us up some coffee?"

"Not for me," he said, "but the pilots drink gallons of the stuff."

Sally took two cups of coffee forward. She did not play at being airline stewardess, but was stewardess to the devoted manner born, if not dressed for the job. Miss Skafe gave satisfaction when she set her mind to it. He dozed again, and when he woke she was sitting across the aisle from him. She did not read that day. She watched Canada slide past below them.

"A penny," he said.

"I was thinking I would like to fly north for ever," Sally said. "The world a pinprick inside space and us a pinprick above the

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north. 'It's big hard country,' you said once to me when I was small."

"Did I?" he said. I should have brought her long ago, he thought.

She looked out again. Then she turned in her dark plum ski-pants and blue suede jacket. If Sally was getting away from it all to deny the world at a northern mine, she was flying there in sensible clothes of becoming colours. "Tell me," she said, "where does this drilling for oil in the Arctic islands lead to? I mean, supposing you do strike it rich, what markets can you hope to reach competitively?"

"None now," he said. "But some day we might keep an ocean passage open through to Hudson Bay, and by the Bering Straits. And some day, perhaps sooner than that, we might be able to ship by nuclear submarine tanker underneath the ice-cap."

"What about harbours? Aren't the Arctic coastlines shallow? Surely that would be a problem."

"So it would," he said, for the thousandth time impressed by the way her mind drove to practical essentials. "It happens that there is sufficient depth at the Nunangiyak Islands, for example. Whether we strike oil is another matter. Whether—even if the oil exists in quantity—it can be exploited is still another matter."

"And still another lovely gamble," Sally said.

"Yes," he said. He talked about some wild ideas that might never come. Then he told her the story of Turtle Mountain, which many people had said was a wild idea. How many people said that now? But uranium was a special case and the big findings in 1948 a monumental stroke of luck. They had to have the stuff. He took his risks and found the stuff; and now, for the present, he reaped the profits. "All that Turtle Mountain will ever contribute to the world is profits for you and atom bombs," her mother had said.

But Sally said now, when he had told her the story of one wild idea become reality, "I have no patience with the prophets of woe who say we're going to blow ourselves to bits. I always tell Mummy and John that the surest way to be blown up is to hide. We can't halt the world in the past, and I don't want to. I'm for the moon and beyond."

"It's a long time since we have had a chance to talk about things together," he said. In these recent years she had skimmed off the cream of her quality with beaux and pleasure. But now, flying north with him today, she was Sally again. "I'm glad you came," he said.

"So am I," she said.

She went to get lunch ready for the pilots while Skafe had a glass of sherry. Since he had given up flying himself—that was a mid-century resolution and surrender to Grace—he saw no reason to deny himself the minor indulgences when airborne. Sally came back laughing.

"What's the joke?" he said.

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"Dicky says I'm the best not-so-little cook in the North Countree," she said. Which remark by the ebullient Dicky Farmer rang a bell somewhere for him.

The commissariat, Grace Skafe, had provided a bang-up lunch—pâté de foie gras, half a bottle of hock, fricassée of chicken heated by the stewardess, fresh fruit, and cheese. "There's nothing like roughing it with Father," Sally said in the cabin of the Crusader flying north, the dark-flecked carpet of the forest and the rock, the smooth white carpet of the lake, not a road, not a plume of chimney smoke to tell of man.

They took on fuel at Fort Smith, where he had landed last summer with Roy Thompson on their way to find the crashed pilots, Mac and Dicky Farmer. They flew again. Sally wore Mac's charm or talisman, his small brass pig on a gold chain on her wrist. She wore it always now. "Dear Mac," she had said at the time. Mac's death had grieved her. It had contributed to her malaise, Skafe thought.

They crossed Great Slave Lake. "Is that a pressure ridge?" she asked about a darker line that snaked across the white as far as could be seen.

"Yes," he said. "They can be tricky on the lakes, on the sea-ice too."

"To cross, you mean?"

"Yes," he said. "They're awkward with dogs, and damned treacherous in a bulldozer weighing eight or ten tons. We test them for thickness, of course."

The north shore of the lake, and now a town. "So that is Yellowknife," she said, having read the guidebook to the bleak far land.

She was a puzzle to him and a delight. Most people were appalled at a first view of the bleak far land. The pinpoint settlements served to accentuate the emptiness, the nothingness, for them. But Sally stared in a fascination stronger than she might feel about the Côte d'Azur or the Caribbean.

The sky was blue and the day intensely bright. Now the ribbed white earth had blurred. "Why?" she said. Her hair was not blonde but halfway dark with a shot of gold in it against the sun, cut short in that charmingly careless new way that girls affected.

"Wind," he said, and wind might disrupt his plans. Which thought of minor troubles was strengthened soon by the intercom buzzer. "Yes," he said into his telephone.

"Can you come up a minute, sir?"

He went forward. Both engines were running sweetly.

"Turtle looks a bit doubtful, sir. Gusts up to thirty-five already and they expect forty. It's one of these polar highs on the move. No warning, down they come."

"Oh, damn!" he said. It was not bad weather. It was fine weather with a wind strong enough to fog-out the land, ground-blizzard fashion.

"We may just get in," Roy Thompson said. "But it will be

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nip and tuck. We have plenty of fuel. The snag is that if Turtle is no good, then the Wells and Yellowknife are sure to be socked in solid before we get there. That means either a long way south again, or into the Dewline. I checked with Fifty-eight. They're in the clear all the way along. But then there's Sally."

"Yes," he said. Miss Skafe was an exhilarating boon companion to him. But if they could not get into Turtle or somewhere with accommodation for women . . . To turn round and fly south again would be an unmitigated nuisance when he was due at Nunangiyak tomorrow. "The thing to do is go and see what Turtle looks like."

He went aft to the cabin. Unless he was flying himself—but those days were over—he left the pilots to it.

"There is some doubt about getting into Turtle," he said.

"Where do we go then? Norman Wells?"

"It's blowing there too," he said. "We might have to turn back or even sit down on the Dewline for the night."

"What fun," Sally said. "I would love to sit down on the Dewline." She smiled, looking out of her window, asking no more questions. If she was thoughtful, it was not about being cut off from the land by a fog of driving snow. She was wholly without the disquiet that preyed upon so many people in the air.

Great Bear Lake was an indeterminate white, a thousand feet, ten thousand feet below them. "It's impossible to judge our height at all," she said. Another thing that Sally had flirted with was flying—she had taken her licence at eighteen and let it lapse, which disappointed Mac. She had no purpose in those years.

"Great Bear Lake," she said. "It's deep, isn't it?"

"Yes," he said, "immense and clear and deep. Angus Sherwood calls it a gigantic pothole."

"Who is Angus Sherwood?"

"A man of the north," he said.

Soon they were losing height to Turtle Mountain. "There it is," he said, when they began to circle on a perfect afternoon. It was only the top of the hill jutting out of cottonwool. He had thought of the north many times on that hill.

"I see the Turtle's nose at last," she said as they swung in from from the west. But that was all they saw.

"No dice," said Roy Thompson's voice, harsh on the intercom. "It's either south to Hay River or Smith, or into the Dewline."

"I'll call you in a minute, Roy," he said.

"We're north," she said. "Don't let's go south again. I couldn't bear it."

He did not like that idea himself. "They're doing a construction job in a pretty rough place," he said, "and they're not equipped to handle women. Besides . . ."

"Can't I sleep in the plane?" she said.

"I suppose you could," he said, and called the cockpit. "Better make it the Dewline, Roy. Tell them at Turtle to let us know immediately that wind shows signs of dropping. And I want the

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Lynx ready for me when I get back there." Or would he get the Lynx to come to Fifty-eight? No, a waste of time.

"Roger," Thompson said. They headed north-east and climbed again.

"How far is Camp Husky from Turtle Mountain?" she asked.

"About three hundred and fifty," her father said. "Three hours plus in a Lynx."

"And when is the cat-train due up there?"

"Tomorrow afternoon," he said, "if the weather holds."

"This weather?"

"No," he said. "That weather. It's a flat calm beyond the coast." And he told her something of Arctic weather.

"So it all depends on your getting back to Turtle first?"

"Yes," he said, "unless there is something on skis available at Fifty-eight."

"Don't they need all their planes for shuttle work?"

"Oh well," he said, "Skafair supplies the Dewline. We're pretty good friends."

She laughed. "'We're pretty good friends,' is lovely big-business talk. You didn't tender for Dewline construction, did you?"

"No," he said. "We're up to our eyes in the north already. I wanted to get more people's eyes involved. They're doing a good job, too, both outfits."

"Do you have to get to Nunangiyak to meet the cat-train?"

"I don't have to," he said, "but this trip completes a most successful supply operation. I want to be there to see them arrive."

"So you will be there," she said, and smiled.

Farmer brought a message. *Sorry about windy welcome see you later Lynx in state of readiness regards Sally from us both. Syme.*

"Send: *Thanks*," Skafe said. "And, *Regards from Sally*."

"Roy wants to know, sir," Dicky said, "do we break the news to Fifty-eight about our stewardess?"

"You'd better warn them before we land, too late for protest."

"I hear a mighty howl of protest, Mr. Skafe," said Dicky Farmer gravely, and went forward.

"Will I be a nuisance?"

"I don't think he quite meant protest," said her father.

"You needn't worry," she said, her face closed off from him.

"I'm not," he said, although the impact of a girl like Sally on an Arctic camp where men worked twelve or fourteen hours a day and ate and slept beside their naked pin-ups and their lurid amateur art might be upsetting. He had no experience of that.

When they brought the families to Turtle, the houses were ready, furnished, stocked—so, one day a bachelor establishment and the next day children played in snowsuits. But Turtle was entirely different—in personnel, in routine production. A brief stop like this would be all right, he thought. The only way it could be avoided was by flying south again, which he did not want to do and would not do.

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"The Barren Lands," he said.

"You lived there once, didn't you?"

"Yes," he said, "my first winter in the north. We trapped, mostly arctic fox; and we hunted caribou, along this country south of the coast." He saw a cold kaleidoscope of that winter.

"You and Jim Willis?"

"Yes," he said.

"That was before, I suppose?"

"Yes," he said. "Before your mother met him."

"What kind of a man was he?"

"There was no better trapper in the north, when Jim would trap."

Skafe thought about Jim Willis, a man long gone, but men who share hardship never quite forget. "Jim would give you the parka off his back," he said, "but he would sell the parka off his back or yours for booze."

"Poor man," she said. "Mummy never talked about him."

"No," Skafe said. "Your mother had unhappy memories of the north. That was part of our trouble," he said, looking down at the barren lands. The wind had dropped. Fly on! he thought, as they flew on to the Arctic coast from the wasteland of ice.

"It's wicked and wonderful," she said. "Or perhaps not wicked—impartial and remote and cold. Like John's death of winter," she said, quoting her brother. "It's impossible to feel from up here in this ritzy comfort. But I don't think I would hate it."

"No," he said, "because you wouldn't fear it."

"You don't fear anything," she said.

"I do," Skafe said. "I fear heights, except from an aeroplane. I fear depths. I fear being sick. I fear myself and what I am capable of." He had told her some fears as they reached the white desert of the sea.

Now the sun rode low. The sun gave a warmth of colour to the cold as it dawdled to meet the rim of the west. They came down to Fifty-eight, which was to be a radar station in the chain across the north to give Distant Early Warning of aerial attack.

There was one low building, shaped like a train, an elongated trailer, or a florist's box. In the middle of the building was a frame of girders for the radar dome, not yet in place. Beside this building was the temporary camp. And everywhere, on a still evening after sunset, rose the shafts of white, of man-made warmth at one speck in the wilderness of white.

"It looks like forty below, by that smoke," Skafe said.

He and his daughter dressed. They fastened their seat belts. It was sweltering. The Crusader came in to touch on frozen gravel. The engines roared with props reversed. They taxied in and stopped. Sally smiled across at him. "The wrong place," she said. "But we came to it."

The construction boss was named Henniker. He was a small man who accepted mixed company as just another thing to be

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coped with. "Best if you and your daughter don't mind sharing my tent," he said. "I'll move next door for tonight. There's room in a bunk-house for the pilots. O.K., Mr. Skafe?"

Skafe knew how such men worked and survived, having been such a man in easier circumstances than these. To protest overmuch served only to confuse another quick decision made. "That's darned good of you," he said before Sally could offer to sleep in the unheated cabin of the Crusader, which creaked already to a seep of cold.

"Let's go, then," Henniker said. "It'll soon be supper-time." He was hospitable in an absent way, deferential in an absent way.

This chap is driven hard, Skafe thought.

The air was so perfectly still this evening as the sunset faded that, standing, you felt no cold but a catch of breath. The stillness contrasted with a hubbub intensified and particularised by cold. Their bags were in the back of Henniker's four-by-four.

They climbed from the airstrip, past a bulldozer ploughing snowdrifts. The driver was an Eskimo, smoking a cigar. Then they were up at the camp, the long low stilted building to the left, tent-roofed huts to the right.

"You're well along with the modules, I see," Skafe said.

"We're coming on," he said. "Pretty near finished except for the radar installation—but that's their headache."

"Whose headache?" Sally said, between them.

"The boys who foot the bill," Henniker said. "We're only the hired help around this place."

"How long have you been here?" she asked.

"A year ago, February," he said. "We pitched a tent, the four of us."

"So you began it and made it," she said. "That's more than just being the hired help."

"I guess it could be," Henniker said. He stopped at the end small hut of a line, got out, and left the engine running.

There were two bunks, one unoccupied, a table between the heads of the bunks, a space-heater, a pail of water on top of that. Henniker rolled up his sleeping-bag. He seemed calm, but it was the calmness of a man who dares not be fazed by anything, lest everything should faze him. "Can you come along a minute, Mr. Skafe?"

Outside again, Henniker said, "I'd better warn them we got mixed company. They're not a bad bunch of boys. She won't mind a whistle or two?"

"No," he said. "She won't mind a whistle or two." It occurred to him that Henniker had seen no more of Sally than two eyes and a nose in a parka hood. He went into the tent again. She sat on a bunk and fingered Mac's piglet on her wrist. "Only me," he said. "Are you all right?"

"I'm fine," she said, looking less than fine for the first time in this long day of flight and change. "Slight qualms about all those men at supper," she said. "The cattle show, I mean."

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There was the loud clangour of an electric bell through the loudness of mechanical sounds. Henniker arrived in a few minutes. His eyes made startled appraisal of Sally without her parka. The cattle show, Skafe thought. He saw Sally's point.

" When you're ready," Henniker said, and they dressed again for a cold hundred yards. Men moved from the splash of light at each bunkhouse door, and across snow on a starlit night, muffled latecomers converging on the dining-hall.

" Do the bulldozers and everything run all the time?" she asked.

" Day and night," he said, " when they're not on the blink or in for maintenance."

" So it's never quiet here," she said. " I hadn't thought of that. I suppose Turtle Mountain is the same."

" There's always a racket," Skafe said. Once only in the productive years had he known Turtle Mountain quiet.

They shed outer clothing in the porch, a hundred parkas already hanging; a clatter of eating, a buzz of talk beyond the door. She would not know that men talked little while they ate in dining-halls like this. They entered to an absolute silence within the noisy camp.

" Up the other end," said Henniker. He went beside Sally, Skafe following.

He looked at the faces, but few eyes considered him. It was the least noticed entrance he had made in years, following Sally, not one whistle, to the table where she turned and smiled at the room and said, " Hullo, everyone," entirely composed.

It was roast chicken for supper. Twice chicken today, he thought, helping himself to plenty, with dressing, green peas, synthetic brown gravy, and mashed potatoes—similar food to Turtle Mountain. You fed them abundantly and well or there was trouble.

He sat on the other side of Henniker, facing down the room. At this table were the camp foreman, the timekeeper, two American electronics men. He must have eaten a thousand times at such a table, looking down the same long hut at the same heterogeneous collection of men, or these men might be younger on average.

He could judge the spirit of a camp with fair accuracy at a first meal in the dining-hut. But not tonight. All down the room the men had their apple pie, or stewed plums and cake; and then sat drinking coffee or tea, and smoking. Talk usually started after the meal. But there was constraint, and little talk except at this table.

Again he was reminded of a silence—at Turtle Mountain when a strike was on, a hushed dining-hall at night, a hushed camp . . .

" Sorry," he said, to Henniker on his right, " I didn't hear."

" I was saying it's ten days since we had mail in the camp. I keep telling them if they want the boys happy get the mail in regular, but I waste my breath."

" That's too bad," Skafe said, sensing that Henniker wanted to tell his headaches, troubles. To give him that chance would be

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the best way to pay for a night's board and lodging at Fifty-eight on the Dewline; but Skafe did not much want to be his small brother's keeper. He wanted to get the hell out of this place, shed it, leave it, go on.

" I guess we'd better make the move," said Henniker.

" Thank you," Sally said to the room. " I do hope your mail arrives tomorrow."

Thus she spoke for a world elsewhere, and they left. " Was I right to say something? " she said, in the tent again, alone with him.

" You were," he said. " You measured up. You always do."

The pilots came in, bringing a fog of cold at the foot of the door, but it was too hot. " What's the news, Roy? " he asked.

" It's blowing now everywhere south of the coast. They don't see any change for Turtle until late tomorrow."

" Oh, damnation! " Skafe said. He wanted to get to Nunangiyak; he wanted to get the hell out of here. " What's the weather west and north of us? " he asked patiently. God, he had to be a patient man. " Sit down," he said.

" Set fair," Roy said. " Winds five to ten, north-west. Temperature going up to thirty below tomorrow."

" How cold is it now? " Sally asked.

" Forty-four below zero."

" You hardly feel it," she said.

" The heat loss at fifty below in still air is less . . ." And Roy Thompson, phlegmatic ox who would chew a grounded cud contentedly from now until Easter if the wind or the president decreed it, began an exposé about heat loss.

" Is there anything on skis available? " Skafe said, interrupting that monologue.

" There was talk of a Lynx due in, sir," Thompson said. "An operator overheard some radio chat along the line, but nothing definite."

" Oh," Skafe said, and none of them spoke for a minute or two while the outside sounds went on, and the pot-burner pulsated quietly at full blast to heat a space about ten by eight by seven with snowblocks round the walls to break the wind, and a canvas roof, and not a stir of wind tonight, this evening, so many hours and so many miles from the house in Westmount above the Boulevard where the day had begun, and this was Arctic comfort, four people sitting two by two on the edges of two bunks, what madness moved the human race. " I didn't hear you," he said to Dicky Farmer.

" The fellows in the modules wondered if you and Sally would visit with them for an hour, sir," said Dicky Farmer rapidly, put off his carefree stride by the Old Man's terse, " I didn't hear you."

" Not for me," Skafe said. " Henniker asked if he could drop in." And what my small host asks of me, he thought, noblesse oblige accords to him. " Do you want to go, Sally ? "

" If Dicky will come along. Yes, I'd love to see the—what do you call them? "

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" The modules," Skafe said. " Unit construction. I suppose they realise that Sally doesn't have security clearance," he said to Farmer.

" Yes, sir. The idea was more of a social visit."

" Take care of her then," he said. " I may be up later on."

Thompson thought he would check again on the weather situation. Thus, Skafe's three travelling companions left him with some alacrity. He pulled his sleeping-robe from the bag, unstrapped it, unrolled it, and lay on top of it, thinking what a damned nuisance all this was, until more knocks, like a boudoir—Henniker, with a frozen patch the size of a dime on one cheek, but he thawed it with his hand.

" Have a nip to warm you up," Skafe said, producing the bottle of overproof rum from his zipper bag. He thought that a nip might improve his own state of mind.

Henniker declined with thanks; then said, " We have to be death on liquor, but I guess the boys won't smell me tonight."

They drank rum and tepid water. It was an encouragement, and Skafe rarely needed that. He saw that Henniker drank for pleasant warmth, not a mounting compulsive need. It could be the dirtiest trick you could play a man in the north to offer him a drink and you never knew until he drank. But this man was all right.

What he needed was a catalyst to cleanse him of his troubles. Now Skafe leaned on his elbow on his bunk, and was catalyst to Henniker. It was absurd that the man would trust him, S. K. Skafe, so powerful that a few words from him—" I'm not sure Henniker at Fifty-eight is quite up to it, been in too long perhaps, seemed to have the job on his back"—would be enough to side-track Mr. Henniker.

If a man annoyed him, Skafe might do just that. But this was a decent fellow, hard-driven, with big brother now to tell it to: mail, weather troubles, jealousies, delays in supply, ingratitude, resentment at Americans calling the tune, but they were good guys themselves.

To be a good boss meant never to let your men see you weaken, and probably Henniker rarely did. So Skafe, who did not weaken to pour it out to any big brother, gave an hour of his time and a little advice, and became Hero Skafe to another man. " I feel one helluva lot better for just talking to you," Henniker said.

He stayed apart from them; he could be forbidding with them and ruthless with them. But he had only to say to an employee or to a stranger, " How are things? " and they poured things out to him.

" That's a dandy, that girl of yours," Henniker said. " No airs about her. She makes a man see what a woman could be like, makes a guy feel better, so the boys are saying."

" Sally is a good kid," he said.

" The wife ran off with a goddam chiropractor," Henniker said. " So my boy's with his granny."

" Oh," he said. " I'm sorry." The wife ran off with a goddam

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artist, he thought, so the girl, Sally, is with her dad, who has another wife to make a guy feel better.

"I would like to do that," he said about visiting the modules, and with the intention of collecting Sally.

They met a breeze as they walked up there, the least flow of air, but enough to strike on nose and cheeks. A single-engined plane flew over, and circled out above the airstrip lights. Beyond the airstrip was the frozen sea, and beyond that sea the continent began.

"Roy Thompson heard that a Lynx might be in," Skafe said. He was much interested in anything suitable that might be in.

"It's news to me," Henniker said. "But half the time you never hear nothing. Bingo, another one arrives, top secret. The security on this thing is crazy."

They were at the end of the building, camp lights behind them, the north star and the northern lights before them, but the northern lights were weak. They rippled up and faded altogether.

"You get brassed off," Henniker said. "But it's worth it for the job we're doing."

"Yes," Skafe said, and was drawn to him, and would say no word to make Henniker question the worth of the job they were doing.

"Like a ship is the way I see it," he began his explanation, forgetting or not knowing that Skafe's own interests had done much to pioneer this stilted ship on land, which swallowed ice to be melted as a side process by the Diesel motors—thus heat, light, water, and humidity, a closed sewage system. Yes, it was like an insulated air-conditioned ship. So, on a smaller scale, was the camp at Nunangiyak.

They entered past the ice conveyor-belt—which was giving trouble—and went on by powerhouse, water tanks, radar area, washrooms, and living-quarters. The doors were open along the corridor. He noticed half a dozen men in one room, but no Sally. Where had she got to? Always an anxiety to him, a damned nuisance to him here and now. He and Henniker came to the radio room at the end of the building, but no Sally.

Roy Thompson was here, leaning against a counter by the main transmitter. Three men stood in the middle of the floor. Two were listening, facing Skafe. One was talking, his back to Skafe.

He did not speak in a conversational tone nor did he rant. He raised his voice in brazen uninhibited exasperation. "I get instructions to have a Lynx at Fifty-eight to fly a party of three east along the line tomorrow. O.K., I'm here, and now you say that you won't fly tomorrow early, and when you do fly it won't be by stages east, it will be eight hundred miles west to Alaska. God Almighty, in a Lynx—and we have a Venture aircraft and two pilots sitting on their bottoms doing nothing."

They were patient and apologetic. They had not known that a C124 was due with equipment. They must wait for that. As for Alaska, they were sorry about the switch. Someone had slipped

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up in not passing that signal. And yes, they did understand about utilisation, but they would ensure that Aurora . . .

" It isn't only utilisation," said Brian Fiske. " It's the pilots. We try to do a decent job, but how can my boys do a decent job when they never know where the hell they are? Warm up, cancel. Who wouldn't be browned off? It's not good enough," he said. "And this damn silly security is half the trouble."

" That's what I say," said Henniker, who had joined them.

" We can't help it about security, Brian," said the taller American. He seemed a good type, conciliatory and patient. " Everyone knows Aurora is doing a darned fine job," he said.

Skafe looked at Thompson, and raised his head, and Roy came over. "Any change in weather? "

" No, sir," Thompson said.

" I see a chance, then. If you took this party west in the Crusader on sub-charter to Aurora, I could take the Lynx on sub-charter to Skafair. Sally is the only complication. Where is that girl? "

" She went back to your tent," Thompson said. " I sent Farmer with her and told him to wait if you were out."

" Good," Skafe said. " She can't stay at Fifty-eight. She can't go with me. You could take her. How would that be? "

" That might be O.K.," said Thompson. He was slow except in physical emergency, infallibly reliable about a million dollars or a woman. " You're set on meeting that cat-train, sir? "

" Yes," Skafe said. " I am." He might have explained, if he could have explained, but he did not bother. " Come and see what they say."

Fiske held his parka on his arm. He wore a green quilted waistcoat of nylon or silk. " Hullo, Brian," said Skafe.

" I heard you were here," Fiske said. " My God, Mr. Skafe, it's good to see you."

"And you," he said. And it was. He had met many men, but few men with this young man's force. He should be building the whole damned Dewline, Skafe thought, not running a shoestring outfit like Aurora under impossible flying conditions.

" I have a proposal," Skafe said. He made his proposal in general terms, and said good night, and took Roy with him to the door. " Fix it somehow," he said. " Come and let me know what you arrange."

He went down the steps from the radio room, and looked at the thermometer. It had risen to thirty-nine below. A bulldozer was still cutting back snowdrifts in this respite from the Arctic winds. The camp worked on by night. Dogs howled at the Eskimo village down at the shore. He walked on packed snow to a perishing private latrine; thence to the tent, and went in to find Sally and Dicky Farmer sitting in silence, but Farmer stood to leave.

" Roy is in the radio room," Skafe said. " You had better go and have a word with him. Good night, Dicky."

" Good night, Dicky. Thank you for looking after me."

"A pleasure," said Farmer, and said good night, and left.

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" I'm becoming a thanks-to-the-gentlemen phonograph record," Sally said. She yawned. " Madly sleepy," she said. " But first I must seek the geography."

" I'll show you," he said. He went with her to stand guard away from that place.

" Gosh," she said, emerging. They went back together and brushed their teeth, and so into sleeping-bags on bunks. " What's the plan? " she said. " I know something's cooking."

" Why? " he said.

" Because the glint is back in Father's eye."

"A Lynx has come in," he said. He outlined his switch idea.

"And what about me? " she said, facing him, her cheek on her hand. Anna used to face him like that.

" You can't stay here alone," he said. " I think you should go in the Crusader. If Turtle is clear by that time, they can drop you off—otherwise the Alaskan trip. That's a town. They could look after you properly there if you had to stay over."

Sally shook her head. " Oh dear," she said, and looked at him again. " I've come so far. Please can't I go to Nunangiyak with you? "

" It's out of the question," he said. " Four hundred miles in a single-engined plane to a place like that? Impossible."

" But the camp is a small version of these Dewline modules. You told me so."

" I told you so," he said. "And I'm saying no."

"And why should you risk yourself with any old pilot just because you have this bug to get there somehow, anyhow? They were saying tonight up there that some of the pilots are terrible. One man's nerves were so shot that he started out four times in perfect weather for Yellowknife, and turned back each time with some excuse about the gaslines freezing up, and the fifth time he taxied out and stopped and got out of the plane and ran away from it."

" I wouldn't fly with any old pilot," Skafe said. " But I would fly with Brian Fiske, the man who took me in to find Mac. Yes? " he called.

It was Roy Thompson. " That's fixed, sir," he said. "As a matter of fact, it helps everyone out. And we raised Camp Husky—perfect conditions. The cat-train should be in on schedule around fourteen hundred tomorrow."

" I have been trying to persuade my father to let me go with him," Sally said. " Not that I don't like flying with you."

Thompson looked at her thoughtfully and at Skafe thoughtfully. " Brian Fiske will be ready at seven," he said. " Good night, then."

He went out, leaving Skafe with the impression that Thompson would prefer not to take her along to Alaska. A responsibility he did not want? Some other reason?

Some other reason such as Dicky Farmer, the irrepressible, the gay of spirit, sitting glumly here with Sally. Enough was enough.

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Enough was too much, was the femme fatale of the polar regions. And it was not her fault. She did not want it now. It was not her fault that in her were combined an extraordinary physical appeal and an extraordinary comradely, vital appeal, the girl men hoped to meet but no man quite had met before.

Now Sally knelt beside the other bunk to say her prayers. Once upon a time he used to say his prayers. He wondered now as he watched her praying; he wondered if life was a slow corruption from the truth of childhood. It was a thought or a fear that had bothered him occasionally, and it bothered him now, watching Sally pray.

"Shall I put down the heat a bit? It's wide open at seven."

"To five, I guess," he said. Even then it would be too hot to lie in closed Arctic sleeping-bag, designed for forty below, supposedly. He unzipped his down the side.

"Good night, darling." She kissed him on the forehead. "We've come a long way together."

Sally switched off the lamp at the head of her bunk. Electric power was commonplace in the Arctic nowadays. Such air-conditioned apartment houses as the one up there would soon be commonplace. But outside was the cold.

The stove flickered. He turned in his search for sleep and saw that Sally slept. "I would like to fly north for ever," she had said today. "The world a pinprick inside space, and us a pinprick above the north. It's big hard country."

Now Simon Skafe fell away to sleep, not to peace and a nothingness of sleep, but to dreams . . .

"What's the matter, Daddy?" she said, across from him.

"Sorry," he said. "I had a dream." Now sleep was kinder.

Far off to the right was land. On the port side a dark ellipse of reflected open water many miles away. Ahead, the sea-ice went on to a vague meeting with the sky. Four thousand feet below, the snow was featureless. Above, the sky was blue. They were an hour and fifty-five minutes out—halfway, he supposed. All's well he thought, comfortable and contented behind Brian Fiske and Sally. He dozed a little, hearing, "One, two, buckle my shoe," the words of the rhyme saying themselves for no reason with no meaning to the periodic of the engine rhythm. He heard Fiske try for contact ahead with Nunangiyak and back with the Dewline, but he made no contact.

Skafe was dozing nicely until things went wrong, not gradually as could happen flying, nor in catastrophic fashion as could happen, but decisively in the form of a viscid deluge of oil on the windshield. The oil pressure dropped.

Fiske throttled back and put down the nose. "What's it like your side?"

"The right corner is almost clear," Sally said.

"I'll take that seat. You get back. Look for a lead," he said to Skafe.

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Visibility was good, but there was a oneness, indeterminate white, and no perspective except in the roughest ice. It was hard to make out . . . " There, I think," Skafe said. " Yes, there! " One stretch of smoothness between a relief of broken ice.

" Right," Fiske said. He turned for it and looked over his shoulder. " Not in the seat," he said, " on the deck, facing aft, soft gear behind her back. Quick now! "

Skafe undid his belt, and arranged Sally and sleeping-gear as instructed, thinking that if they should bounce she might be worse off unstrapped on the floor than strapped in a seat. " O.K.? " he said.

" I'm fine," she said. " But I'd rather see." Her face was pale.

Skafe sat again. The windshield was now opaque except in that dwindling corner through which Fiske peered. " It's O.K.," he said, " but too short for comfort. Hang on."

Skafe saw the ice, snow-covered mounds, bare green triangles, crazy columns rising to his side window, and then the Lynx was down on the lead, hitting hard, not bouncing, skis trundling, slowing, almost stopping, and he braced his hands against the seat in front.

" Hang on," Fiske said again. They struck at a modest speed, no more than ten miles an hour, crunch, stop. " Get everything out! " A few minutes from, " One, two, buckle my shoe," to abandoning ship at the end of a lead on the sea-ice.

Skafe threw most of the gear out to Sally and passed some breakables to her, working fast against fire, but no fire came. " That's the lot," he said outside.

One propeller blade was bent in by ice. The port wing rested against a spear of ice, and gasoline feathered from it to melt a patch of snow on the lead. The fumes were not strong. Fiske held an extinguisher but the oil smoke stopped. Sweat beaded into hoar frost on his forehead, and now he pulled up the hood of his parka. " No bonfires, anyway," he said.

" You did well to get us down," Skafe said. Half blinded, he had done well.

" I did badly to pile her up," Fiske said. He climbed to the top of the pressure ridge against which the plane had run. Skafe and Sally joined him.

In every direction the ice rolled like a bumpy countryside—fields, boulders, crisscrossed walls under snow, but a splash of green ice here and there. " Is a lead where the ice formed last? "

" Yes," Skafe said. " Or it can be open water. What now, Brian? "

" I'd better try to raise someone before the battery gets cold. Can you pitch the tent? "

" Yes," he said. " You have a snow-knife? "

" In the grub-box." Fiske jumped down. He looked at the bent propeller. " That settles that one," he said, and he went into the cabin of the Lynx.

There was a faint breeze from the west. Skafe probed with the

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snow-knife, found a good place in the lee, and pitched the tent with Sally. It was light single canvas, a two-poled tent. "Shovel some snow round the foot of the walls," he said, and went to seek a drift of uniform consistency for snowblocks. It was a long time since he had cut a snowblock. His nerves were steadying.

"What next?" Sally leaned on the shovel. "I slightly thought we'd had it," she said.

"In another half-minute we would have been blind," he said. "With another pilot we might have had it. Are you all right, pooch?"

"Yes," she said. "Keep me busy."

He lit the gas stove and told her how to melt snow for tea. Fiske was calling on the radio. Skafe went back to cutting long snowblocks, eight altogether, he was clumsy at it. Then he set up his windbreak round the head of the tent.

"You cut a nifty snowblock," Fiske said. "Where did you learn to do that, sir?"

"In my salad days," he said. "Did you get through?"

"Not a peep out of anyone. The nearest is about a hundred and forty miles, and at this time of day at sea-level . . ." He shrugged.

"What's the temuperatre?" It was twelve below zero by the plane thermometer. The sun was now hazy, the rim of the sea-ice indistinct.

"Tea ready," she called from the tent.

A tarpaulin on the snow, boxes to sit on. "It's as warm as a house," she said. They drank sweet tea at noon, ate frozen doughnuts, and discussed the situation. They had not left Fifty-eight until nine, delaying to watch a monster C124 open its maw and disgorge many tons of equipment.

"We were due at Camp Husky around one," Fiske said. "So by two, things might begin to buzz; by four or five someone will be looking for us—probably the Crusader, if they haven't taken off before we're missed."

"Weather permitting," Skafe said.

"Do you think it's going to blow?"

"In my day it usually did from a quick rise in temperature."

Fiske smiled. "Or from any change," he said. "Or it just blows. When did you winter in the north, sir?"

"Nineteen thirty to thirty-two," he said. But he thought, In forty minutes from now we would have been circling that tractor train—the yellow cats, the drilling gear on the sleds, the smoking caboose, archaic modern caterpillar crawling at four or five miles an hour into Nunangiyak. But here, perhaps there, perhaps everywhere, it was going to blow. The tent was perfectly still. The gas stove hissed. Now he put might-have-beens away.

"It was an oil-line, I suppose," she said.

Fiske nodded. "A fracture from the union. It's just had a five-hundred too." He put down his mug on the snow of the tent, laid the back of his hand against his eyes, and took it away. He looked tired, drained out. "Sorry," he said.

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" You got us down safely," Sally said. " We have food and a tent and a stove, and all the snow in the north to make tea. Don't apologise."

" Things go wrong," he said. " It's somebody's fault. Therefore mine." But he smiled, sitting on a box in his dressy green waistcoat, quilted swansdown. " What next, would you say, sir? "

" Tie down the plane," Skafe said. " How much snow is there on the lead? "

"An inch or two."

" Then we'll have to chip ice to set the toggles. Melt us lots of snow," he said to Sally. She pumped up the stove. She was as adept with mechanical things as her brother was clumsy.

" Come on," Skafe said. Fiske seemed dull after his immediacy of action, brilliantly taken, but now only passive measures to be taken. Skafe knew the feeling, the let-down condition; he would be over it soon. In the meanwhile, take charge of him. " If it blows," he said, " it may blow all round the compass. The plane faces west. Shall we settle for west? "

" Whatever you say," Fiske said.

It took some time to chip small trenches with the hatchet, one for each wing and the tail, and set the anchor toggles, a line to each, and pack them with snow, and add water to freeze them in.

" That should hold her," Fiske said. " If they harden in time."

Now the sky and the snow were one. Now you could see to a pressure point a hundred yards away or to a sea mountain twenty miles away, whichever, whatever it might be. Now you could not distinguish flat snow from a hummock at your feet, subdued immeasurable world. " It is extraordinary," Sally said.

"A white-out," Skafe said. " Hila Kapuk, the Eskimos call it." He was pleased with himself for remembering.

"And so quiet," she said. " Like a great din of quietness."

" Yes, it's like that," Fiske said. " What now, sir? " He was cheerful and alert again, but not bossing the expedition. He went to the plane. " One above zero," he said. " Spring is with us."

"And so is the wind," Skafe said. It came quietly, a puff from the west. Sometimes the winds came with stealth. Sometimes they came full strength out of calm. This vanguard of wind brought chill, and did not stir the snow, and passed on to the east.

" No sleeping skins? " he said, meaning for the floor of the tent.

" No," Fiske said. " You can't get caribou for love nor money."

" We can use my deerskins. Separate them, Sally, all fur to the outside."

" Won't you wear your deerskins? " she said.

" Not in a tent. Put everything we need inside with us, and the rest back into the plane. Quick, now! "

It was almost three o'clock, time frittered away in the muted weather. Now the wind grew as they did the few things still to be done—deerskins, tarpaulin, food, gas, kerosene, lamps, a 30.30 carbine in a case. Fiske came back from the plane. " Everything aboard," he said.

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" Check the tent-pegs," Skafe said, the boss. Well, naturally.

They watched the wind grow from the west to pick up snow, to run gravelly wisps of it, modest beginning, an idle scurry of white along white. The wind gathered to pluck at the snow and spin it to snow-devils that scuttled merrily along the lead, this way and that way to die against the walls that framed the lead. And now the wind rapped on the tent, rap-smack, rap-smack.

Inside, she said, " I thought fine weather was the forecast."

" So it was," said Brian Fiske. " But highs, lows, warm fronts, cold—the met. boys can't compete. You usually get some warning and I guess there was today for those who heard it."

" Have you often had to do this? " she asked.

" I've had to sit down for weather a few times," he said. " I never cracked up on the ice before. We could have made it in a Mink," he said. " We could have made it in the Lynx in colder weather."

" Why? "

" Because cold snow is slow snow." He laughed. " But we didn't make it. No more spilt milk."

" You don't spill much. Who runs Aurora when you're away? "

" Tim Roncaroni is my number two," he said. " He's in Yellowknife at the moment. Are you hungry, sir? "

" I'm famished," Skafe said. He explored the emergency rations, a Skafair box, an Aurora box. This fellow could have managed Skafair, he thought, starting at—what was it I offered him?—twenty-five thousand, on top of a whacking good purchase price. But no—he had to run his own piddling show and run into this sort of thing, just what I warned him about, a crack-up or two—good-bye, Aurora. " There's stew," he said, " or bully beef."

They agreed upon stew and dehydrated potatoes. Skafe let the others do the work. He took his middle-aged ease as wind grew to pester the tent on the sea-ice, and he watched Sally slice shavings deftly from a snowblock to fill a pot, two aluminium pots, and set them on the burners. She put her bare hand to a can of stew.

" No," Fiske said. " That sat at thirty below in the plane all night. It'll burn you." He touched a finger to cold metal and showed it to her, the tip blanched instantly white but colour came back.

" There's lots to learn about this kind of picnic," Sally said. She seemed engrossed and happy; and now, using a glove, she put the can of stew into melting snow.

" We might as well light the primus for tea," Fiske said. It made a throaty roar in the tent, which was hot.

" How are we for food and fuel? " Sally said.

"A week's rations anyway," he said, " two gallons of kerosene, plenty of gas. We're sitting pretty. Listen! " he said sharply, and pushed his head out through the flap.

The stove and the primus made small loudness in the wind. Fiske came back, his head white with snow, but he rubbed the snow from his hair and eyebrows.

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"What was it, Brian?" Skafe had heard nothing out there but the wind.

"A plane, I thought," he said. "Probably not. Did you hear anything?"

"All I heard was the wind," she said. "They wouldn't be searching, would they, in this?"

"A waste of time," he said, "or worse." He had black hair, as black as Anna's when she was young—wet black hair, and a wet face, red from the wind, greyish eyes, life in this young man in the pallid light of the tent. "Here, I'll do that," he said, and employed the can-opener.

Now the stew was hot, the potatoes ready. "Supper's up," she said. They ate from tin plates with spoons.

"Full marks to the cook," Fiske said. He was quite pally with her in a casual way, like John with her.

"Yesterday we had pâté de foie gras and chicken and a potable hock for lunch in the Crusader; today the best stew in the world for supper in a tent. Life with Father. You're quiet," she said to him.

"I was thinking," he said. He had been thinking that by now the news would be out; by now Grace would be at the Nelson Club in Antigua, B.W.I., and someone would have told her. Dear Grace, he had been thinking. Husky Skafe overdue in Arctic, he had been thinking.

The wind grew by lull and by gust to higher points of strength. The direction was changing. It had begun from the west, square to the eight-foot pressure ridge, the tent in the lee, the strike of the wind at the peak of the tent. But now the wind was backing south.

They had pilot biscuits and raspberry jam. How delicious the hard tack tasted. What wellbeing from Brian's strong tea.

"Warm and snug," she said, "while the cold world thunders. I must look out." Sally parted the flaps. "Not so nice," she said, turning to sit again, and she shivered from cold or at a first sight of the fiend out there. "What if the tent blows away?" she said.

"It won't," he said. "But we could build a snow-house. I remember the first time I was caught in a blow . . ." And, telling her of his fear that first time, he eased Sally's horror of the blind white rack that she had glimpsed.

"You love it," she said. "You thrive on storms and trouble."

"No," he said. But he did in a way. "You see through to the essentials," he said. "One essential is that I shouldn't have landed you in this."

"I landed myself," she said. "Plumb up to my neck. You know I did."

"Yes," he said. He laughed at his daughter whom he had cosseted and spoilt all her life.

"I would say she landed plumb on her two feet," said Brian Fiske. He smiled his vital smile at each of them . . .

Now the wind was broadside to the tent. The south wind drove at the tent by Sally's head, and the canvas drummed. They were

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These are:—

1. **THE WHITE 'KERNEL'** of the wheat grain. This is mainly starch, and the experts call it the endosperm.
2. **THE HUSK OR BRAN.** This is the tough, fibrous outer skin of the grain, which our digestive systems cannot absorb.
3. **THE WHEATGERM.** This contains a high proportion of the wheat's nourishing properties.

Now what happens to these three parts of the wheat once they have been separated? That depends upon what kind of flour the miller intends to make. For instance . . .

WHITE FLOUR is made from the white endosperm alone The bran is taken out and used to make animal foods. The wheatgerm goes too—and to make up for its loss, synthetic vitamins and other nutrients are added.

BROWN FLOUR varies, but usually contains endosperm, part of the wheatgerm, and a fair proportion of bran. Wholemeal flour is made from the whole grain, with nothing added and nothing taken away.

HOVIS FLOUR. This is natural, creamy-white flour, from which all the indigestible bran has been taken away. The wheatgerm has gone, too—but only temporarily. It is lightly toasted to improve its flavour and then put back into the flour. *Then extra wheatgerm is added, so that the bread contains about eight times the normal amount.*

Well, now you know the facts, what do you think? Have we been fair to say 'Don't just say brown — say Hovis'? Or should we go even further and say . . .

Don't just say *bread* — say Hovis

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quiet in the wind, which grew to be mighty, and Fiske said, "There's cord in the plane, and pegs, I think; extra mooring lines to the peak of the tent?"

"We might as well," Skafe said. "Do you want me to help?"

"I can manage," he said. Fiske put on his zipper parka, which was of American type with a better hood than the Canadian, woollen gloves and mitts. He took the hatchet.

"Don't worry, darling," Skafe said. "It's quite all right."

"Like some beast," she said. "I'll get used to it."

She put on more snow to melt, but her hand was trembling. He had not seen her afraid before. "I see Mummy's point about winds," she said.

"How did you find your mother?" he said. "How did you find your mother?" he had asked John, and now he asked Sally in a tent to take her mind off the wind, but he wanted to know.

"I didn't find her," Sally said crossly. "Sorry, darling," she said. "Mummy was—oh, I don't know. She was fine."

Fiske sang out there on the weather side. He sang: "*Down a shady lane in the sugar cane, a burly bum come hikin'.*" He sang strongly in the strong wind, securing one line to the peak of the tent, and then another. He sang overhead, "*Where the limmonade springs, and the bluebird sings, On that big rock-candy mountain.*" He sang lustily in the wind, and hammered tent-pegs into hard snow, and then the wind drowned his voice.

Skafe put his head out. "Brian!" he called.

It was snowing as well as blowing. He could see the outline of the plane fifteen yards away, and he could see the grotesquerie of the pressure ridge near at hand, the plane and the ice and blind white snow. "Brian!" he called.

Fiske came downwind and into the tent. He took off mitts and gloves and held his hands to his face until the ice loosened. "I don't like that toggle on the windward side," he said. "It's working loose."

"Can we set it again?" Skafe said.

"If the temperature would drop . . ." But through the wind and through the soundbox of the ice a loud smack and complaint of metal, smack again. "There she goes," he said. "Now everything is well and truly mucked. I beg your pardon," he said politely, and went out again.

Skafe prepared to follow him. Dress, undress, what a clumsy, maddening business. It was dusk, but he could still see a silhouette of the plane, wing up, wing down. "Stay here!" he said to Sally. He had the flashlight in his inner pocket.

He met the wind, and a whiff of gasoline in the wind. Snow plastered his face, nose, eyes, and mouth, and burnt cold pain between his eyes, and froze his eyelids together, and he shielded his eyes. "Not very clever," Fiske said round there. He had all his weight on the half-inch nylon which had tethered the wing to the toggle in the ice, but the toggle dangled from the rope. "You hang on," he said. "I'll chip it out."

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Skafe took two turns round his mitt, and put weight on the rope, his back to wind, and shone the flashlight for Brian Fiske. It was blowing hard. It blew a gale. It blew like the fiends of Hades or some cold place. The wind danced him like a marionette suspended from the wing. But he hung on while the wind shifted again. It backed to the east.

The wind was colder, still more wicked, but now the change of direction eased the wind's grip. Fiske had finished chipping ice. "Need more rope," he said, for the wing had risen. He took off his mitts and worked to free the knot. The flashlight beam was dying in the cold.

"Here's water," Sally said, adding her weight to her father's weight on the rope, and the wing came down.

"Good for you," Fiske said. He set the toggle again, packed snow, poured water, more snow, more water, but then the water pot had frozen solid. "That should hold her now, with the wind from the tail."

They were in the tent, in the blissful heaven of the tent. Any heaven must be blissful, but it was bliss, a painful bliss of thawing out. Fiske had nipped his nose and two fingers. "You have faces like Eskimos," he said to the Skafes, rubbing his hand back to life.

"I was only outside a minute," she said.

"We should have tethered her facing south," Skafe said. "My fault, Brian."

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" You can't tell which way the winds will go," he said. " This is just not our lucky day, let's face it." He was more human, less arrogant than Skafe had thought that other time.

" There was a smell of gasoline," he said. " Your starboard tank must have sprung a leak."

" Yes," Fiske said. " Which puts paid to a number of things, the Florida climate being the first. But we have a primus and plenty of kerosene for cooking."

" What else does it put paid to? " Sally asked.

" I hoped to fit a new prop and patch her up and fly out of here, but now she won't hold gas." Fiske lit the hurricane lamp, and the place was more cheerful.

The wind had backed half a compass to blow from the east at the flaps of the tent, which were lashed tight, but the wind fought through them. It grew colder, but did not now grow in strength.

" We should get ready for the night before the gas stove dies on us," Skafe said. " If you want to go out, Sally," he said, bluff and impersonal—how else to be about that hideous excursion?— " remember that the plane and the tent are against the pressure ridge, so stay between them and close to the ridge."

"All right," she said, and dressed and went out while he and Fiske spread the sleeping-bags. " We'll put her in the middle," he said. " Is that rifle loaded in case a bear should chance along? "

" Yes," Fiske said.

They lay in the cold tent in the wind. " How long do they last? " she said.

"A day, two days, sometimes even three," he said.

" Now let's see," Sally said in the dark beside him. " How did it go? *A man who has sat out an Arctic blow the hard way in a tent, or has sat out enough of them to lose his first fear of them, will not forget that on his backside in an office chair.* End of quote. It holds for a female too, I guess."

" Who said that? " asked Brian Fiske.

" Simon Kepple Skafe," she said, " also called Husky, the Arctic dreamer."

Fiske laughed loudly and heartily in the wind. " The Canadian family Skafe," he said. " You're quite an outfit."

And half of the broken outfit was here. Now the wind came in gusts, a long way growing on the ice to buffet and thunder at the tent, a long way dying, and the next gust came.

" What else lives in these parts? " Sally asked, between them. " I mean animals."

"A bear hunts a seal," he said. "A fox and a raven take the pickings. That's about all, on the sea-ice."

" It doesn't feel like a sea," she said. "And people? "

" There are a few Eskimos and a mission at Hummel Point," Fiske said. " Thirty-five miles north of us. Otherwise no one."

" Thirty-five miles," she said. " It might be thirty-five hundred in the wind. Daddy, what was our grandmother's prayer? You used to say it some wild nights when we were small."

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She was an Irishwoman, a Protestant O'Connor, and this was her prayer: Oh, God give us strength for the storms of our journey.

"Amen," Sally said.

"Amen," Brian said.

Simon Skafe put his head inside the bag, with an air-hole for breath. His breath formed ice and a frigid trickle. The wind blew steadily again. It piled into the tent and heaved at the tent, but the sound of the wind was muffled. He was cold. He was contented, strangely contented, strong for this storm of his journey.

The wind blew in the morning. "I light, you cook," Fiske said. "How's that?"

"O.K.," she said from inside her sleeping-bag.

The primus made a homey, homely, homelike promise in the tent. "Over to you," Fiske said, and he went out.

Sally sat up. "It takes the edge off," she said about the stove. "Did you sleep?"

"Off and on," he said. "I dozed in limbo." The night had been wind, a snatch of sleep, and cold—it went on through blowing, sleeping, waking, freezing, on and on.

Sally looked all right, wearing her sleeping-bag to her middle, wearing her parka, wearing her green woollen tuque that Grace, amid a welter of packing, had found two hours or three or whatever it was to knit for her as a present for this expedition, typical of Grace. "It's the craziest thing I ever heard," she said in the car two days ago, and had said much the same thing when she applied the finishing touch—a red tassel for Sally's green woollen hat. A toorie was Anna's Scottish word for tassel.

"It's a corker this morning," Fiske said. "Twenty-eight below from Greenland's icy mountains. The prospect rivals man for vileness." He looked less cheerful than his scramble of that hymn. "I don't get it," he said. "The wing seems all right, and yet both tanks are empty, I suppose the gas siphoned from the starboard tank through the crossfeed system." He sat down, white from head to foot.

"You must brush off your snow," Skafe said, "or this tent will be a frozen puddle." He was strict about it.

Corned beef hash again for breakfast; then pilot biscuits and jam, but the jam was frozen; then a brew of tea to bless the spirits of the party; then they went out to the wind to erect a wall of snowblocks. There were new drifts, which made the snow bad for cutting, but the master cutter achieved some indifferent blocks and his assistants built the wall against the killer wind, which still blew as it had blown all night—at the flaps of the tent, and drifting in.

They thawed themselves, turned off the primus, and went back to bed, or to bag, wearing everything except flying-boots. They had fleece-lined overboots, adequate for Dewlines, Camp Huskies, and that sort of circumstance, not adequate for this open air.

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The day dreamt on in a sort of dream of talk in the tent, which the wind attacked from Greenland's icy mountains. Or probably it was a cyclonic spinner of a storm, but the wind was not to be imagined as anything but a straight wind round this narrowing world, still a long way from the Pole, thirteen hundred miles or something. If there was an east wind at the Pole, which way did the wind blow but from the south? That kind of brainteaser triviality; and also talk about the only people who quite existed in this wind-torn world.

"Where do you come from?" she asked on her stomach, face propped on her gloves in the middle of the trio.

"From Vancouver Island," he said. "But we moved there. I was born in New Brunswick, on the Nashwaak River near Fredericton."

"And I was born at Gallery," Skafe said.

"Really?" said Fiske. "I didn't know." He was not at all abashed about not knowing the birthplace of one of New Brunswick's more notable sons, most notable bar one or two.

"Which makes our small world still smaller," Sally said.

The wind changed tone. It ran on past them and away; and for a second or three or five or ten, there was no more wind than would blatter a tent. One could even imagine a world without wind. But it came again.

Talk in the morning, listen, talk, laugh as the joke wears thin,

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talk, listen, go inside a bag as child into tent of darkness in his bed.

" Let's have a brew." It was noon again, twenty-four hours in residence. The primus warmed the upper reaches. If you stood in the peak among steaming socks on the washing-line, you felt quite cosy, and your lower half remained quite cosy in the bag, like a sack race. The wind had put on new rhythm. Now it blew in long peaks and troughs round the world, the great wind growing to a seventh wave of wind, or so you might imagine.

" Perhaps this is the swansong," Sally said.

" I think it must veer first," said Brian Fiske. " When it unwinds with the clock, the wind will die."

" I like that," Sally said. " The wind must unwind with the clock to die."

The other two were talking. They disagreed intelligently, and Skafe went to sleep.

When he woke the wind seemed quieter and the weather colder. All this time there had been the chorus of wind, many-tongued beast, but now: *boom—boom*, through the very pinnings of this world. " What's that? "

" Ice pressure," Brian said. " Like the sonic boom, it's nothing lethal."

" I forgot about the cold sea underneath," she said.

" What I was saying," he said, and he talked so quickly on, Skafe thought, to take Sally's mind from another cold beast, " is that I started in flying, and we're making a success of it with Aurora, if the luck holds better than this sort of episode; but on the whole, luck is what you make yourself."

" Well," she said. " I suppose so."

" I mean you have to meet your luck head on."

"And if you met worse luck than yesterday head on? "

" You still would be meeting it," he said.

" I must say that's absolute and good," she said. " Go on."

" Flying is not what I'm after ultimately, but you have to use your beginnings to take you on. As I see it, Aurora can be the link for me between the established south and the new north—just a linking service, a start, if you see what I mean."

" I think so," she said, " but a link to what from what? "

" To the new things that are coming, the sort of development in the far north that so far only your father has done much about."

Skafe lay submerged in his sleeping-bag. He listened, and they thought he slept.

A scuffle with boots, a scramble with flaps, and Sally went out to the wind.

" I was only gassing away to keep her mind off this bloody storm," said Fiske.

" I know," he said. " I was interested to hear you talk just now. We share some ideas about the north. You are right, too, I think, to consider Aurora as a link on your way."

" Oh yes," said Fiske. " I wonder if both tanks are quite bone dry. There's a length of rubber tubing in the plane. When she

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comes back, I think I'll see if I can't siphon a cup or two for the stove." It was a clam-up or a brush-off about business matters.

Sally crawled in. "It's snowing less," she said. "I saw blue sky once above." The tears of the cold east wind were icicles on her face, but she took off her gloves to thaw her face.

What possessed me to bring her? Skafe thought.

"Where has he gone now?" she said, getting back into her bag.

"To see if he can get some gas. He's a stout lad, Brian, if opinionated. But opinionatedness is youth," he said. "You're all the same."

"Are we?" she said. "Oh listen!"

Sure enough, it was a plane, twin-engined, he thought, growing louder in the wind. They went out, and through the blizzard they saw a smudge of moving silver against the blue beyond the racing veil of snow. The sound died away to the east. Fiske called something from the black plane with the yellow wings, just visible, but they could not hear him, and they went in again.

"They can't have seen us, Father."

"No," he said. "It's like a lace curtain. You can see out from the house. But you can't see into the house from farther away."

"Some house," she said. "Will they find us?"

"Of course," he said. "When the blow stops, they'll find us right away, or in short order." Or so he hoped. It was not quite as easy as pie. "Did you think they might not?" he said to his valiant daughter.

"I didn't know," she said. "Nobody brought the subject up. And what then?"

"Then they'll take time to pick a lead and collect us."

"And what about his plane?"

"I don't know," he said. "It depends on the damage. But we'll see that Brian doesn't lose on the deal."

"Magic," said Brian Fiske, putting down the tank of the gas stove, "I squeezed half a pint." He brushed his snow off. They were learning that discipline. The stubble on his face was thick and black. He looked tough, and was.

Now the timeless drift of the day had stopped. Now a plane and warmth brought time back here.

"Such heaven," she said, shedding clothes to her blue suede jacket and combing her hair, but Miss Skafe did nothing silly like putting on powder. Her right cheek was chapped from a frost burn and her lips were cracked, and she looked remarkably beautiful, cooking supper, or heating it. "The likes of us don't cut no ice," she said, "not what you'd notice except right here. But—"

"But what?" Fiske said. He had the primus going too. It was a splurge for warmth.

"But think of the headlines about the captain of industry lost in his beloved north."

"That will be all from you," Skafe said. He had been thinking of that hue and cry. It was his due, and it pleased him, and might

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serve some purpose: *Safe and Sound. I told you there's nothing to it.* Still, he crossed his fingers about the *Safe and Sound*.

The wind had blown from the east for twenty-four hours, easing this afternoon, gusting by long waves, long troughs, the sea of wind.

But now the wind grew again to solidness, changing again, edging north. It was the worst wind yet, the coldest wind, the strongest wind, strong enough to take the flimsy tent in his fist and whip it away from them, and then he would have them defenceless on the ice to work his merciless will on them. He was a killer god, the wind.

Skafe thought of broaching rum, a sup, a schluck for each of them. But no. From the wonderful warmth to a doubled pit of cold.

"Will it never stop?" she said.

"Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow, it's a corker, chum," said Brian Fiske, and then he sang about the shady lane, the sugar cane, burly bum come hikin', lookin' for his likin'. And he sang, "*I wanna go where there ain't no snow . . . And the wind don't blow . . . The Big Rock-Candy Mountain.*"

"You can sing," she said. "Sing again."

"That was for the never-never land of milk and honey," he said. "That one was for the birds. This one is for the storm. Do you know the choral part of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony?"

"Sure we know the tune," Sally said. So they sang a wordless ode to joy.

"Now to sleep," Sally said in the wind.

Being young, perhaps, they slept at once. But Simon lay awake. He remembered singing with Anna once upon a time beside the green Mackenzie River where the north began for him. And now in the tent in the great north wind they had sung of the brotherhood of men. Now Simon's breath condensed to trickle and to freeze and now his few tears of joy and sorrow added dampness, and he slept.

It was nearly three. The north wind battered at the tent, and something that was not the wind nosed at the tent. "Light!" said Brian Fiske.

Skafe brought out the flashlight that stayed alive in his sleeping-bag with him, and Fiske held the 30.30 carbine, but the visitor departed, took leave, stayed away, and only the wind nosed at the tent.

"A bear?"

"Yes," Skafe said. "That was Nanuk, the Polar Bear. They won't bother you." You're telling me, he thought. You're telling me you don't feel bothered by them. "They hunt downwind in a blow," he said.

"Seekin' milk and honey," said Brian Fiske. "Seekin' blubber for no money."

"Now I'm not afraid," she said, between them.

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" Sleep again," Simon said . . .

They had a late breakfast of bacon and pilot biscuit soaked in bacon fat, gobs of warm fat to crave for warmth, for caviare, for oysters, a Lucullan banquet, fat, blubber blubber bacon fat. The wind held north. It had abated at the start of this third day, but still blew hard enough to keep the blizzard flying on the ice. The snow-filled tracks of a big male bear ran on to the south.

It was their enemy the wind that brought the sound of dogs, a yelping excitement on the wind, come racing with the wind. Then a man shouted his dogs to silence. Thus swiftly out of the north came a man with dogs. He set the grapnel anchor into snow and tipped the sled.

" Dogs hunt Nanuk," he said, taking off his mitt to shake hands. He was an Eskimo named Charlie Avakana, short, square, and broad with smiles.

They gave him a hearty welcome, a slug of bacon fat, a mug of tea. He pulled his deerskins over his head, and sweated in a shirt.

He spoke little English, but it it transpired that some radio at Hummel Point was on the blink, and that this camping party was a surprise to him, although it did not seem to surprise him much. He said that his dogs followed the trail of the polar bear. He pointed south and spoke of open water far away, no doubt that same open water reflected as a dark ellipse of cloud two days ago when they were flying. Two days ago?

" Big blow," he said about the wind, in which he jaunted after polar bears. " Nowna," he said, not knowing when the wind would die, tonight, tomorrow, sometime.

" Can travel," he said, very happy about taking them to Hummel Point, about losing his chance to kill Nanuk who had led him here.

He was a very happy man when laughing which was often, but his face in repose wore melancholy. His face was light mahogany, or russet-apple, undiluted slab-faced Eskimo.

" We can leave everything except our personal gear," Skafe said, and he asked Charlie Avakana if he could manage sleeping-bags and other bags as well as passengers.

" Sure," Charlie said. " Sled light for Nanuk." He was full of glee. " Get Nanuk other time," he said.

" I'd better stay here," Brian said.

" You can't do any good by staying," Sally said. " If you came to Hummel Point, you might fix the radio he says is on the blink. Transmitter radio? " she said to Charlie Avakana. " Send messages? " She made outsending gestures with her hand.

" Yeah," he said, raising eyebrows in the affirmative. " On blink, not much."

Brian wavered in doubt. For once in a way he seemed unsure. " Well, I guess that makes sense," he said to Sally.

Skafe put on his deerskins, which had served as insulation at the central part of a floor of snow. He turned the young caribou hide fur inwards, the outer parka fur outwards. His deerskins had

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been presented to him by some pretty good friends with big interests in the North.

He made Sally wear his buttoned parka on top of her own, his two layers of pants. Thus, she was double or quadruple clad against the cold, swimming in his clothes.

"Are you going to be warm enough?" she said to Brian Fiske.

"All I possess is on me," he said. "And I can run."

Outside, the wind blew moderately, and outside now, two dogs fought in a fury of hate. "Rover! Moose!" Avakana shouted at them, and he quelled them brutally with a chain.

"You have to hang on," Skafe said to Sally, behind him on the sled. He had forgotten almost everything that came rushing out of long ago to be remembered.

"Ho!" called Avakana. "Ho!" And the big white lead-dog swung left from the pressure ridge, swung left again, Avakana running, guiding the sled through rough ice that bordered the lead. They turned their backs to wind. The black plane with the yellow wings was gone in the snow, and the tent was gone. The snow hooked into the lee of their parka hoods, into their faces, but it was not bad.

Avakana rode square to wind. There was some music in his shouting, his cajoling, his encouragement, calling them by name, "Idivaluk—Screwball—Beaver—Kingi—Moose." The lead-dog was named Liar, but he seemed a noble animal.

Hours sitting on the sled, fifty jogging paces now and then for warmth. Fiske ran often, being the least well clad. Sally ran, for she was young. Skafe ran no more than he could help, being fifty years of age last week.

They stopped once to melt snow, ice up, eat a doughnut, brew tea. Avakana smiled often, but he did not talk. The steel runners were coated with a few inches of frozen mud, and to this smooth surface ice was applied. He iced his runners with a wet cloth in his bare hand at whatever the temperature might be, perhaps thirty-five below zero Fahrenheit, sixty-seven degrees of frost. Then he ran up and down his runners, flipping the rag for a final pebbled gloss. Then he blew on his hand and laughed.

They travelled again. The wind veered now. It swung to the east as it fell, and now you could see in dim white weather—the flutings of the snow, the cornices, the anvils which were the patterns carved by the last great wind, and it had been from the north.

Avakana ran against the pointers of that wind for home.

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From "Where the High Winds Blow," by David Walker to be published by William Collins, Sons and Company

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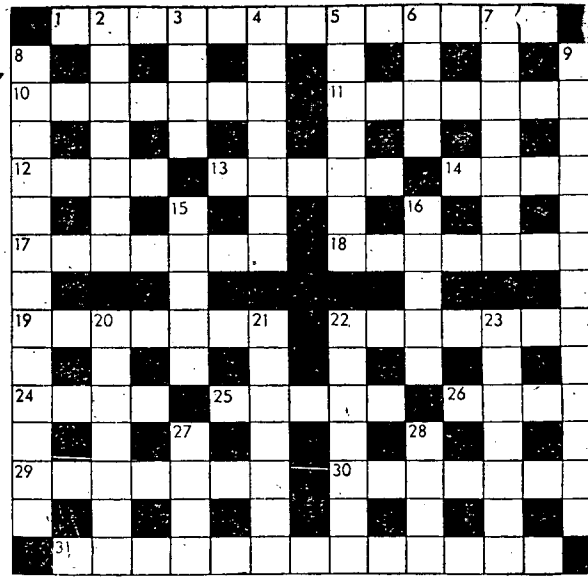
ARGOSY CROSS-WORD

★

Solution on Page 32

★



CLUES

Across

1 Hannibal's Cannibals ? (13).

10 These pipers and a' (7).

11 Six in stray sheep makes one cross (7).

12 Starve at rate of knots (4).

13 Boat B for the cleric (5).

14 Lumberjack's grin ? (4).

17 Russian ballet ? No, Sullivan's opera (7).

18 Poets of good standing too ! (7).

19 More than allows for hanging (7).

22 Flees to promontories at east and south (7).

24 A spirit for Lily ? (4).

25 Isle in panic or furore (5).

26 Yet more than average stingy (4).

29 Jack Dawkins' forte (7).

30 Book one can count on (7).

31 There's a serving in this ratio (13).

Down

2 In Asia men suffering from oblivion (7).

3 Weedy freight (4).

4 Unlike Victorian kids (7).

5 Credit with devil or lacking reverence (7).

6 Beast declares itself algebraical (4).

7 Venetia in simple guise (7).

8 Do they have quick motion ? (8, 5).

9 Unblushing behaviour (13).

15 Pulse broth, as it were (5).

16 —— it on the wall! (5).

20 Los Angeles beneath wash ? (7).

21 Wet, sycophantic type (7).

22 Turk's something of a fiend with expeditionary force (7).

23 High schoolboy (7).

27 Over fifty the Member sags. (4).

28 Upset 26 as fitting end (4).

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